



カケロウ

-the
children
reason-

じん(自然の敵P)
イラストしづ

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Kagerou Daze III - the children reason -

Konoha no Sekai Jijou

“Ah, wait, one last thing before I die. Could you tell the other me something?”

“*What is it?*”

“x x x x x x x x x x x x x.”

“.....*I can't promise it.*”

“Even so, it's fine. Thanks for everything.”

This is probably the end for me. Up until my very last moments, I was so gullible.

Ah, if I could have one last wish granted,
it would be to tell that girl who would always hit the gullible me.....

Kagerou Daze 01

From an unknown direction, the melody of “Sunset Koyake” was floating through the air.

The blue sky that seemed to be dyed with the melody slowly turned thick orange.

On the bus that was moving along the rough-surfaced road while making “gadagadang” sounds, the number of passengers was slowly reducing, until I was the only person left.

Even though my classmate who had just gotten off of the bus wasn't a very close friend of mine, I still felt some loneliness in the bottom of my heart every time I was alone with the Sunset Koyake melody playing.

I was so bored that I started picking at the sponge that was flaring from the seat. I looked out the window again, but what entered my eyes were only lush crops at the farmland in the background and old poles that constantly passed through my sight.

At any rate, this wasn't something that could kill my boredom at all.

I sighed and closed my eyes.

It would be great if I could freely use a mobile phone at this moment.

I suddenly recalled a TV ad I had seen at my friend's house, where the setting was in a monorail in the big city.

Everybody was staring at their smartphones, as if they had entered their own worlds.

Watching all that through the CRT had already been enough for a village kid with high expectations like me. Even the kids who were almost the same age as me could already have their own mobile phones, strolling through the big city, going any place they wanted to.

I guess they could also contact their friends to go out and play, couldn't they? They could text or call each other, go online and share their statuses, or discuss things in a forum, even at night.

To fulfil all these expectations I once even went to the electronic appliances shop on my way home.

In this pathetic village where one could hardly spend any money on entertainment, all I could do when it came to New Year's and receiving red packages was save money like an idiot.

I once grabbed my pathetic savings, arrogantly saying "I'M GONNA BUY A MOBILE PHONE!!!", ran into the shop, and then tried my best to explain what the heck a mobile phone is to the shop owner.

Of course I didn't get a smartphone then, but I was however recommended a really antique and lousy phone. Who knows? It might benefit me as a lifetime experience.

...

However.

Whether the situation I'm in right now is an important lifetime experience or not doesn't matter to me at all.

As much as I want to beg for a phone, who could I beg?

If I were to ask my stubborn parents, they'd most likely chide me "It's still 20 years too early, kid" and probably lock me out of the house, allowing me to experience the horrors of the dark night and the wild dogs.

Putting me through that kind of survival game was totally unnecessary. Even if I really wanted to buy a phone without letting my parents know, I couldn't buy it anywhere near my home.

It would be great if there was a chance for me to go to town, but I had never been given that chance, not even on New Year's, end of the year, or even the Obon Festival.

But maybe *someone* could give me that chance.

Ah, no, impossible, I'm not the kind of person that stuff like that happens to.

The only things I knew about mobile phones were the meanings of the expressions "calling", "texting" and "being online".

Heck, it was all my parents' fault.

If a child were to watch television alone, they'd be crying and shouting for it, but because of my parents who stubbornly reject the modern society, I couldn't even catch up with the local topics, not to mention trends. I don't even have the basic social knowledge.

But then, a mobile phone feels like it would be pretty easy to hide inside a pocket, so I assume my parents wouldn't find out if I actually bought one.

Soooo, if I can buy a mobile phone like I wish, everything will be just fine.

The problem is getting it, as I currently don't have nearly enough information. I should ask someone.

But...

"If I could do that, it'd be the happiest thing in my life..." I sighed while muttering my feelings of yearning.

Yeah, there's one person who I could turn to.

To be strict, it's "possibly" turn to, but definitely not a person who you could turn to carelessly.

She, Asahina Hiyori, is someone who is so hard to be close to, so hard to talk to.

She's the daughter of one of the top 3 richest families in the village, and she has played the piano, taken ikebana classes, ballet classes etc. since young, and she also sometimes goes to the town when there's this seminar thingy.

Not only that: even though I was far away from it, I could clearly see that she was likely showing off her cute cellphone the other day.

She must have bought it in town. Therefore, she's a pretty much suitable person to ask about phones.

However, this conclusion was already reached a very, very loooonnnnggg time ago.

The biggest problem is that Asahina Hiyori is EXTREMELY likable, and my love towards her is EXTREMELY deep.

“Although I live in this really small village where there’s no fun at all, there’s this one great part that makes it unique: the fact that Asahina Hiyori was raised here.”

A few weeks ago, one of my classmates wrote a love letter with that kind of content and gave it to Hiyori, and it can’t be overlooked that it was spectacularly rejected with the sharp word “GROSS...”

Sigh, yeah sure, it’s gross, I know that. Asahina Hiyori is freaking cute, and I’m not exaggerating at all. She’s not just cuter than any students in the class, but even extremely cuter than any of the child actors or models from the magazines and posters.



Of course, her popularity is awfully high among the guys: there are even rumors and sayings like '*the only way for a boy to become a man in this village is to fall in love with Asahina Hiyori*' or '*simply throw a stone and you'll hit a Hiyori fan*'.

More, I'm actually a downright Hiyori fan myself.... Nonono, to be precise, it should be HIYORI ADDICT. Compared to those "crazy Hiyori fans", by either "rate of affection" or "rate of belief" or even "rate of amount (unofficial)", I definitely wouldn't lose to anyone.

A professional Hiyori fan keeps himself busy since early in the morning.

6 o'clock in the morning, the first thing to do after waking up was to greet one of my "soft and fluffy Hiyori plushies (DIY)" of "the rim of 48 Hiyoris" with a bright smile. During breakfast I'd be looking at the "Hiyori timetable" while calculating "the percentage of the possibility of meeting Hiyori". I'd also decide on the best place to meet her.

Before going to school, I'd once again strictly choose a "Hiyori photo" I like the most, carefully slot it inside my pass holder, and then go to school with a smile.

If after smelling the scent of "Hiyori hormone" (the feeling differs for each person, for me it's "fragrant") in the air around the school I get to see Hiyori in person, I'll just observe her with a smile on my face.

If there's the luck of being near her at that time, it's definitely forbidden to carelessly greet her. That is the difference between a *crazy* Hiyori fan and a *true* Hiyori fan.

In this situation, crazy Hiyori fans would reluctantly start a dialogue with her, sticking to her and trying to attract her attention with an excited intonation. These kinds of actions towards Hiyori only have a seriously negative effect.

For example, this morning there was this dude trying to approach Hiyori, and I was gritting my teeth witnessing the scene. Of course, as expected Hiyori used her sharp heirloom knife "GROSS. Go away." as an extreme kill move, grandly KO-ing him.

Later, an in my opinion excessive group from Hiyori's team of guards aggressively dragged that frustrated dude to the storeroom of the sport center, but what actually happened there is something that for the sake of my mental health I better not think about.

Therefore, a true Hiyori fan will never do that kind of disgraceful stuff. Just stare at her from far away, be grateful of her charm and make it your power to move on for tomorrow. Such a professional job.

And so, as a professional, I don't know how the heck I am supposed to discuss such a lame topic with Hiyori. Basically, it's just like that: thinking about what I desire her to do, that kind of wish is virtually extravagant hope.

However.

That evil desire right at the bottom of my heart wouldn't stop itching.

Yes, the wish for a mobile phone actually had a deep secret aim in it.

".....I wanna text with Hiyori."

Oh no, not just text. I want to call her too. Not just meet up with her on the bus, I even want to have secret chats with her that nobody else would know about every night.

".....I wanna do it....."

My thoughts were starting to become intense and I almost spilled all my desires out my mouth. I closed my eyes and clenched my fist tightly, once again feeling things as they really are. *That dream is far far away, it isn't something that you can hold by a cold weak hand.*

"Aiyaaa, if you wanna do it of course you can, but you've reached your destination yoo."

Those rather abrupt words all of a sudden brought my mind back to reality.

Attacking me while I'm unprepared, just who the hell is it?! I lifted my head and searched for the source of the sound, and as expected, the impatient driver was looking at me with the "I've found something interesting~" expression.

Without thinking, my shame started to boil.

"WAHHH! ...S, sorry!!! I'll get off now!"

Knowing I couldn't undo that buffoonery he'd just seen, I quickly stood up from my seat in embarrassment. I still needed to give my bus pass to the driver before getting off the bus, so I slowly opened my bag in order to find it.

"Uhmm, pass, pass.... ehhhhh??!! Where is it... no!! I remember I brought it?! Please wait....."

I searched every corner of my bag, but I still couldn't find the pass which I was sure I'd put inside.

“Dammit... I left it at home...?!! How could this be...?”

Earlier that goofy act, and now THIS. My brain went totally blank due to shame.

“Ahh? It’s okay. One day doesn’t matter. I’ve been watching you ride this bus every day, so I won’t suspect you.”

The driver who couldn’t stand it anymore patted my head and gave me a smile.

Ahh, what a nice person. Although I don’t mind being accused of “riding a bus without evidence” and being brought to the police station, this kind person still saved my life.

“I-is it okay?! I’m really sorry, I’ll bring it tomorrow.....”

“Oh, never mind, never mind. Still, my lil’ child...”

The driver stopped patting my head and gave a serious look. His eyes were shining too.

“Ehh? Aahh, what, what?”

My heart shrunk as I was feeling uncomfortable again. I knew it, forgetting my pass wasn’t a good thing at all.....

“Ahh, you said ‘I wanna do it’ just now huh? I remember when I was your age I really really wanted to DO IT SOOO BADLYYYY everyday.....”

“OK THANKS BYE”

Before he could finish his words that made people think up a nasty misinterpretation, I quickly ran off as fast as a rabbit.

As I landed on the ground I quickly turned right in front of the old bus station.

I could still hear his voice from far away, saying “Be careful on the road~~”, but he was too dangerous. WAAYY too dangerous. I don’t know why, but yeah, he was definitely dangerous. I really wanted to leave and forget about everything.

I slowed down my pace, lifted up my upper body. Far away, at the end of the long pedestrian road, the black dyed mountains were starting to swallow the sun.

The sun set, it was late.

Although it's cool at evenings, the heat remaining from the day still twines in the air and my skin could feel the breath of the upcoming summer.

"What shall I do this summer? Last year I spent the whole time helping in the field, I guess this year will be the same again, huh....."

I've been stuck in this tiny village for over ten years. My impression of summer was just hot weather and memories of working in the paddy field full of mud.

".....Travelling..... That's not possible at all. I'm lacking money. However, I'm sure....."

I'm sure that Asahina Hiyori will make a trip to somewhere and enjoy a perfect summer. I'm just guessing, but I'm pretty sure she will.

No matter the world or standpoint we are in, everything is different between me and her, so I guess the scenery she sees every day is something a normal boy couldn't imagine at all.

I understand that, that's why I have expectations, and that's why I'm so in love with her.

Being showered by the sunset, I was having those thoughts while looking at the broad farmlands being dyed orange, looking at my tiny house that was a stone's throw away from the village. Right at the end of the spacious open land, thin smoke was coming out from the tiny chimney.

When was the last time I went out of this village? I couldn't remember, maybe because it was already that long ago.

And my short, 10+ years of life will be a lackluster thing that I won't be able to remember, too.

When will be the next time I get out of this village?

I started to imagine a future scene where Hiyori and I are in a monorail, thinking about our destination, laughing together.

A warning came from somewhere around my chest. "IMPOSSIBLE", I subconsciously understood the message.

"So that's what I'm saying, should I really give up that easily....."

Shallowly sighed, I speeded up my pace to finish the journey back home.

Me, who bluffed a lot, could hear a voice, teasing me from somewhere.

“Are you anxious, bro?”

*

“Al, almosstttt.....”

Carefully, as if I was pouring souls into it, I sewed my thoughts away, needle by needle.

“I’ll sew you into a cutie.....”

It was almost 10 pm.

Thanks to my mom who cleans up my room every day, my room was now clean.

Once I got back home I immediately sat down in front of my desk beside the window. After making a few stitches I took a good look at it, and after another few stitches I was charmed by it, and that has gone on and on for around 4 hours.

That’s right, I’ve been working on this huge project of making a “Hiyori voiced plushie” for over 3 months, and now, finally, I’m close to finishing it.

“THIS WILL CHANGE THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE ASAHLINA FANDOM ...!!”

It was such a marvelous scene that I couldn’t refrain myself from getting goose bumps.

It wasn’t only cute, but it had Hiyori’s unique looks. I cutely tidied up her black hair, put on a strapped dress for her. Although I’ve snared through all of her clothes, I chose the clothing that she likes the most.

Luckily, I found a recorder when I was in the electrical appliances shop looking for a phone.

In this recorder were stored all her voices from every time she’d happen to pass by me during these last few weeks. And if I insert this through the inner part of the plushie’s back zipper, I’ll get an effect similar to actually talking to Asahina Hiyori.

When I’d started making it, I had this aim of “*I’ll try my best to prettify her and bring her to town!!!*” I bet this flawless thing will turn all the Asahina fans’ knowledge into history.

And now there’s only one stitch left in this huge project..... Just one more stitch and it’s complete.

Temporarily stopped my work, I closed my eyes.

Recalling those 3 months back, they could've been the most adventurous trip I've ever had.

No no, of course it's all just a delusion in my brain, but those high intentions I had while making the doll, imagining me and Hiyori travelling to all kinds of places, felt like we had been travelling around the whole Japan for about 3 weeks.

“.....awwyeahh.”

Sinking into the memories only lasted a little while. Now it was time for the last stitch, and I was focused again.

“This time..... FINALLYYYYY....!!”

“HIBIYAAAAAA YOURR PHONNNEEE COME AND GET ITTTTT!!!!!!”

I was startled by my m0m's sudden shouting, so much that my hands were shaking. *AND THE NEEDLE COLDLY STABBED MY “HIYORI VOICED PLUSHIE'S” BODY.*

“GGGGGGYYYYYAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!
!!!!!!”

!!!!!!”

Looking at the scene, I screamed. My mind went intense, nerves were taut, and all I could imagine in my brain was a scene where Asahina Hiyori was being pierced through by a large pole.

“I.... I ACTUALLY.... DID.... DID THIS KIND OF FAULT!!!”

My shivering hands covered my face.

In my brain, my shouts became hollow. What did Asahina Hiyori say before she died? To be honest, I couldn't remember ever talking to her, so I couldn't think of a specific line for her to say. I could only feel the atmosphere of the moment.

“HIBIYA~~~ I SAID COME DOWNSTAIRS NOW!!!!”

Hearing my mom's cruel yelling, I finally recovered; I decided to leave my project aside for a while and went downstairs.

“Ahh~~ geez, I KNOW, OKAY!! I'M COMING!!”

After carefully placing my “Hiyori voiced plushie” on the table, I spun my chair until it was facing the door and jumped off of it.

I opened the door, ran down the squeaky stairs, and reached the phone that was located in the corridor of the first floor. The receiver of the old dial-up disc phone was violently thrown on the counter top.

“Just what the hell who would actually call at a time like this..... AND JUST WHO THE HECK IS IT?! Why didn’t mom state it clearly.....”

Although I was curious, I still picked up the receiver and spoke.

Someone who’d call at this kind of time must be someone who’s hard to deal with, I guess. I think I should be a bit rude to this person.

“Ah~ hello, Hibiya here, who is this.....”

“Damn slow.”

I was about to rudely respond, but towards this totally unexpected caller, my rudeness became indecisive.

At the same time, the short sentence spoken by that person’s voice would have given me an overwhelmingly huge impact no matter what the caller’s attitude was.

“Eh? Whaa...”

“I said you’re damn slow. I’m standing while calling you right now. So I’m freaking tired now.”

That attitude, that voice couldn’t be mistaken. I was definitely sure.

The one and only Asahina Hiyori, with that one and only proud attitude of hers, was at the other end of the line.



“Are you listening? Hello~~ is anyone there....”

“AHHH?? Miss Asahina?? I, I’M LISTENING!! YEAHH I’M LISTENING REAAAALLYY EARNESTLY!!”

Being faced with this kind of situation, my brain stopped working.

“Wh-why are you so excited you gross.... Ah~ whatever. I have something to discuss with you.”

“Di, Discuss???”

“Yea, discuss. Or to be precise; make a deal? Whatever it is.”

Who would have actually expected such a development? That person was me back on the bus. Me, who was thinking “I wanna do it....”

IT’S TRUE, YO.

But then, why discuss something around midnight?

“If you wanna find me, no problem. I’ll always welcome you... Ah, nothing, no prob, anyway, what’s with the discussion?”

“You dropped your bus pass, right? I found it in the school corridor today; it has your name written on it.”

That was a very clearly understandable reason for a discussion. I was so engrossed in thinking about the making of “Hiyori voiced plushie” that I completely forgot about my pass, and now it’s been found in this unexpected way.

Oh wait, no; it was all the driver’s fault.

I wanted to forget about that unlimitedly wretched driver so badly that I kind of erased my memory about the lost bus pass too.

But now, I’ve found the connection.

She actually purposely called me because she found my pass. What a nice person. I knew it, Asahina Hiyori is an ANGEL....

.....No, wait a sec.

I feel like I’m forgetting something. Something extremely.....

-- *Before going to school, I'd once again strictly choose a "Hiyori photo" I like the most, carefully slot it inside my pass holder, and then go to school with a smile. --*

"...Hey, are you even listening?? Your weird stuttering just now really pisses me off. Oh, and, inside the pass....."

"OH NOPE THAT'S NOT MINE"

"Haa?"

It all came to the state where my sweat could accumulate into a puddle and just spurt out of me like rough waves.

My brain kept rolling on:

"i'mdoomedi'mdoomedi'mdoomedi'mdoomedi'mdoomedi'mdoomedi'mdoomed".

The "i'mdoomed" festival was grandly starting, and on the tower in the center of it all, Amamiya Hibiya was right there, being nailed to a pole while his neck was being placed on the guillotine.

I'm doomed.

DEFINITELY DOOMED.

And what a coincidence, in the photo I'd placed into my pass holder today her skirt was being slightly lifted by the spring wind, so it was a slightly dirty, REALLY NOT GOOD PICTURE.

I could've still lived my life with that picture in my pass, but now she herself has found out about it.

Everything is over. Absolutely over.

What "Hiyori voiced plushie" you idiot. This is totally a self-defeat.

If I don't do something..... What should I do.....?

"How can it be? There's your name right there, dude. Say, you didn't notice that you dropped your pass..... How did you even get off the bus?"

"M- Maybe it's someone who has the same name as me~~ LOOK! You can find lots of people named Amamiya Hibiya righhhtttt"

"I don't think there's anyone who has such weird name besides you. Back to the topic. That thing inside the pass holder...."

Too late. Here comes the climax of the “i’m doomed” festival.

On the tower, strong men with their faces covered and dressed in loin cloth were taking out a big knife, pulling the rope of the guillotine; the tightened rope was making squeaky sounds.

And Amamiya Hibiya there was making a happy face as if he already knew his sins.

It’s useless. I can’t hide anymore no matter what I say. At least, make it a clean cut.

“Ahh, AHHHH that’s right!!! I know it’s impossible, but at least I can daydream about it right????”

I wanted to tell her my honest feelings but I don’t know why I voiced them so damn awkwardly.

I know I’m guilty, but at least I can still defend myself a bit, can’t I?

“Ehh, why’re you so agitated?? That’s really gross.”

Aaand as usual, my thoughts were simply crushed into dust.

The last tear of my Asahina fan life quietly ran down my cheek.

I closed my eyes, thinking about the other guys who were weaklings like I was right now, floating in the air naked, welcoming me.

I’m sorry for taking you all as idiots back then. Take me along with you, please.

And if possible, at least let me bring my plushies and photos.

As I was having those lame delusions, beautifying my death look, Asahina Hiyori said something that was totally unexpected.

“What impossible what, why are you so assertive?? I even purposely called you to help you achieve it, dude.”

“Eh?”

This reply of hers has become one of the top 3 creepiest things I’d experienced this year, and heck, I don’t understand why.

But I did hear the word “help you achieve”. WHAT’S GOING ON?!

“Help me achieve..... don’t tell me that.....”

"Eyy, I meant it, kay? I understand that enthusiasm of yours, that's why I said I'm gonna help you, okay?"

In the "i'm doomed" festival in my brain the tower in the center massively exploded into dust.

The nailed Amamiya Hibiya suddenly, as if he had awakened an incredible power, gathered all his breath, took the blade of the guillotine, and effortlessly bent it into a useless piece of metal.

"Re-REEREREEREREALLY??!! Eh, EeEeEeEhHhHH IS IT TRUEEEE??!! IS THAT RIGHT??!! EEEEEEEHHHH I REALLY CANNNN??!!"

"You're too loud, ugh, you're damn noisy and damn gross!! Don't make me repeat, kayy!!"

"R-roger that!!"

"Good. Ugh, never mind. I knew you'd have that kind of response. Well, you really want it that bad, huh? You're always thinking about it, huh?"

During this unexpected speech, my heart was intensively pumping. Today's a busy day for my heart, I guess.

"Want"?! Is it okay to put it like that?! I don't think the morals nowadays allow things like this??!"

"Nonono," I was thinking, "I shouldn't be so indiscreet."

If I do that I'll become like a monkey. And that won't be good.

"Ah, I really want it."

Aand after thinking, the conclusion was that Amamiya Hibiya has decided to enjoy being a monkey.

Who wants be a good boy when there's such a big opportunity in front of you, dude?

Aahh!? Inappropriate?! WHO CARES!!

"Yeah, even up to the standard that you placed it in your pass holder, huh. I see you obviously really want it. Well then, I'll help you get it."

"Y-you will....?! Really...?!"

In that moment my perspiration was gorgeously covered by my nosebleed.

Those naked dudes who were about to welcome me started glaring at me, but of course, I didn't care. You monsters. Disappear now.

"Under one condition: oh, that's the deal I mentioned before. I'd like you to help me fulfill my wish." Hiyori said lightly.

Normally, she should be at least a little bit shy when talking about this kind of thing. Ah no, I'm just being ignorant, love these days has become smarter than I thought.

But I suppose this trend only appears on the surface, right? Yea, she must be feeling so shy now. As a guy, I should conduct the conversation.

"Of course, no prob! As long as I'm able to do it, it's fine! Leave it all to me! Well then, what's your wish?"

"You, you sound quite energetic, huh..... hey, I know it's a deal but, in a nutshell, this is a way to achieve your 'ardent desire'. Say, are you free this summer vacation?"

"I'm free! Yup! All I do is help at home, no appointments at all!"

"O- okay, I see. Well then. I want you to reserve all your time during summer vacation. We're going to town. Ah, just the two of us."

"Eh?"

Although I'd prepared to face somewhat difficult questions, what Hiyori requested was still extremely strong.

"Let's go on a date somewhere nearby" would still be acceptable, but she just said *"we're going to town"* in a village where even *"hey, I've found a beautiful valley, let's go there and eat some onigiri"* is considered a rampaging invitation, so even a high school student wouldn't dare request such a thing.

What's more, she said *"just the two of us"*; wow, she is daring isn't she? However, I couldn't accept an invitation of this sort easily...

"Wh-why to the town? Plus, just the two of us...."

"It's nothing, just that I wanna get something from town, so I decided to go there myself. Plus, I'll be needing a "luggage carrier" and that's why I invited you. Why? You don't want to go with me?"

"Of, of course I want to go!! But then..... My parents are very strict.... and about the travelling fees....."

"You don't need to worry about that. Since my family is rich, I'll help you out. Hey, I wanna go without letting my parents know, too..... Ah! Of course you'll have to keep it a secret. Don't tell anyone, okay?"

"Not even my parents?!"

"That's right. Plus it's easier if you wanna achieve your 'ardent desire' right? Since your parents are strict?"

She's right, if I were to tell them I'm going to accompany a girl, it'd be scary, it'd be impossible. *"Hiding the truth from your parents, travelling with girl you like"*, well, that itself is completely enough to grant my 'ardent desire'.

I see, the fact that Hiyori is rich is well-known in this area, but I guess it'd nevertheless be easier to handle the travelling fees of only two children.

Still.

If it's to buy things, why can't she just ask her parents to buy them for her?

To achieve my ardent desire..... It still didn't make sense as an explanation. Even if the date was in the village and not in town, I'd already be satisfied with that.

Why so daring that she wants to go alone with me? The only reasonable answer appeared in my brain:

".....She's so fascinated with me that she'd go this far"

"Eh? What did you just say?"

"Ah, ah~ no, I didn't say anything! Yup!"

As I was immersed in my narcissistic thoughts, I suddenly woke up.

Long story short, Asahina Hiyori is so fascinated with me that she can't help herself.

Just when she's thinking about me day and night, what a coincidence! She finds my pass with her photo inside. Therefore, she used the "discussion" and "deal" as excuses to approach me.

I feel that even though on the outside she wants me to "help her achieve her wish", but in her heart she wants to embrace me right now.

Wishing that "just the two of us went on a distant trip" was the best evidence. Saying things like "luggage carrier" was actually just a cover-up for her shyness.

"I understand now, your feelings, I've accepted them...!"

"Fe-feelings, so gross.... Listen here, kay? You'll need to try your best to find the thing I want, too, okay? If you're useless, I'll send you back immediately."

Asahina Hiyori's attitude was as cold and dull as ever, but when I thought of it as her way of showing affection, I found it even cuter.

Still, just what exactly was "that thing" she wanted?

Although it might be only an excuse.....

"Ah, yeah! Of course..... but what's "that thing" that you actually want?"

"Eh? It's an autograph from a new popular idol. Haven't you seen her before?! 'The sixteen year old cutie who can capture your heart!' that CM. I really like that person~

"REALLY DAMN FREAKING CUTE YEAH?!"

"Ah, nope, I don't watch TV so I don't know..... Eh, ah~ I see....."

All of a sudden, my feelings stumbled.

When Hiyori was talking about the idol her intonation immediately went ebullient, which was, truth be told, already enough for me who was excitedly thinking "*we're going on a far-away date*".

To think of it again, of course her first aim couldn't have been just spending time with me. Keep dreaming, dude. Anyway, I didn't know who that idol was, but if she could capture Hiyori's heart, that was really kind of creepy.

"St- Still, a celebrity's signature isn't very easy to get, right...."

"Heheheh. Usually it isn't. As for this time, there's a chance."

"Chance? You mean like a ticket to an autograph session?"

"Oh no, no way. More, that idol hasn't done any autograph sessions before. I think it's because her popularity is too high; wherever she goes there'll always be a crowd of fans surrounding her, which I really can't understand."

A new popular idol whose popularity is so high that she can't organize an autograph session, what kind of peerless beauty is this?

No, I don't think she's someone really incredible.

There's no girl in this world that could win to Asahina Hiyori's beauty.

Still, if there isn't an autograph session, doesn't that make it harder to get the autograph?

I hope she won't say something like "You'll need to get it for me no matter what".....

"Heh, the truth is, my brother-in-law is her school teacher. An idol as a student, like, seriously! A moment ago he called me and said, 'I'll help you get the signature, why don't you come here and have fun during the Obon?' Sooo, I was planning to go there as a trip, but my parents went mad, saying 'you don't even bother to study well, but you're still playing tricks like this~', things like that."

"That's why you're hiding from your parents"

"Yup, and that's not all. It'll be my first time going to town alone, so I was thinking you could help me carry my luggage. Understand?"

If it's like that, even saying ridiculous things like "*Just the two of us going on a trip*" is fully understandable.

Since she has a relative who's so close to the idol, I guess a signature is easy to; the accommodation won't be a problem too.

Hiyori's personality is like this: once she gets scolded by her parents she'll just go alone. From this angle, the meaning of "*just the two of us going without letting our parents know*" seems pretty obvious.

If that's the case.....

"That, that means the necessity for me to go with you..... Actually exists?"

"Uh, nope, but if there is, maybe it's because you seem like you're willing to listen to my commands"

I felt that something sharp had just pierced through my heart. In front of Asahina Hiyori's casual attitude, the smile of Amamiya Hibiya, who was thinking about "*she was so fascinated by me.....*" disappeared without a trace.

In other words, basically, Hiyori has absolutely no special feelings towards me.

At the “*i'm doomed*” festival in my brain, the mighty Hibiya kept on tearing cloth off of the masked men, once again tore the execution into pieces, but then suddenly huddled and knelt to the ground.

“But.... I thought you wanted to grant my wish..... isn't that what you wanted??!! How can you simply.....”

“As I was saying, what the hell were you talking about from the start? Accompanying you when you buy a phone has nothing to do with my intentions.”

MOBILE PHONE?

Why are we talking about mobile phones all of the sudden? I don't think I've ever mention anything about mobile phones during our talk.

Wait.

Let me just analyze the whole conversation little by little again.

Asahina Hiyori found my pass holder with her photo in it. After that, she told me “*I understand that enthusiasm of yours, that's why I said I'm gonna help you*”.

Later on, she even said those unforgettable words “*You want it right?*”

No, I'll never forget that.

Then why talk about mobile phones.....?

There shouldn't be anything to do with mobile phones.....

“.....Ah.”

My brain popped out an abominable hypothesis and I said it out loud.

And this hypothesis was like the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle, and it was clear enough to erase all the commotion in the situation.

I subconsciously glanced at the full-length mirror in the corridor, and of course it reflected me, who remained the same since getting back from school.

I hastily put my hand into my chest pocket into which I usually put my pass and realized that the thing I usually put in the pocket with the pass had disappeared.

"You think about mobile phones that much that you even cut out the ad and stuffed it inside your pass holder, huh? I already told you that I'll purposely bring you along to grant your wish, why are you trying to pick an argument with me?"

At the moment that freaking stupid misunderstanding had finally came to a clear end, my ecstatic mood from back then heavily fell onto the ground.

What Asahina Hiyori saw wasn't the photo.

Wishing that someday I could talk to her and bring up the topic, I'd had an ad of a department store with a discount for a phone stored in my pocket.

Why didn't I notice it all this time?

It's true that I became indecisive when she called me.

Still, this kind of misunderstanding was really too cruel.

What "*She must be a SHY GIRL*". What "*I really want*". Go die, you shameless pervert.

Just that when I recalled everything that had happened, I couldn't prevent myself from screaming "UwaaaAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!". I felt like hitting my head on the pillar, but now to think of it, one important question hasn't been answered yet.

".....Is there anything else inside the pass holder, besides the ad?"

I asked, trembling, but Hiyori just sighed as if speechless, and coldly replied.

"Is it something important? There's nothing else besides the ad..... Why? Was there supposed to be something important in it?"

"Ye-yes. Erm....."

I KNEW IT. The photo wasn't in Hiyori's hands at all.

No wonder. If she'd actually found that photo, she wouldn't have called me; instead she would have called the juvenile crime branch at the police station.

Still, if you think about it, it's reasonable. In school, the closer to Hiyori's age, the more the Asahina fans.

--Simply throw a stone and you'll hit a Hiyori fan--

And that's why.

If say, one of the hungry hyenas found my pass holder with that meticulously chosen photo by me, the professional Asahina fan, before Hiyori came in, what would he do?

The answer is obvious.

He'd take out the photo and dump my pass holder back to its original place. A pass that could be only used in my tiny village is completely worthless to him.

More, it had my name written on it. If he were to steal something that leaves a clue, it'd be bad for him.

If it's just the photo, it doesn't matter much if it's stolen. If I were to report something as disposable as a photo to the police, saying "I've lost something and I've been looking for it for a long time", I'd probably end up at the juvenile crime department.

Considering the fact that I could have been accused if my sexual addiction were to be exposed by Hiyori, in some way that guy actually saved my life. Thinking about what would happen if the worst scenario played out made my intestines roll. I guess I'd get to eat a few years of jail food, wouldn't I?

"I see.... so that's the case....."

I leaned on the table where the phone was placed, still holding the receiver, and slowly sunk to the floor.

"I, I say, you're pretty weird...."

"Ah~ yea. I know everything got pretty weird right now. Sorry."

Conclusion: it was all just a misunderstanding and my lame delusion.

Although I was so blown away by the huge gap in my happiness just now that I couldn't straighten back up, yet, oddly, I felt relieved.

In the end it was just castles in the sky. I knew it; Asahina Hiyori is still a rare beautiful flower that someone like me couldn't ever touch. And because I clearly understood that, I kept daydreaming. Looking at this huge possibility then seeing it extinguish once again forced me to face the truth.

"So? You going? Or not?"

"AH"

Hiyori spoke as if she wanted to quarrel, yet patiently waited for my reply. My cold heart started to pump intensively again.

That's right. It's not like this is the end.

Or to put it differently, right now, the opportunity is right in front of me, just like a miracle.

Even if it was all a misunderstanding, even if I was impetuous towards Hiyori, she didn't seem so distant from me anymore.

She's on the phone with ME. She's inviting ME to go on a trip with her. I don't care what the aim of the invitation is. Is there really anything that could make me happier than that?

I stood up, using my free hand to support my body.

“Of course I’m coming. Let’s have a happy summer vacation together.”

That's right. Everything will start from here. There must be something that has already slowly working on it.

Even if it's a coincidence or luck, it's fine. No matter what, as long as I don't give up, I'll definitely convey my feelings for her.

“Mhmm. Well then, I’ll leave you for now, but be prepared, kay? We’ll start planning tomorrow. Understand?”

“Roger that! Please take care of me.”

“Yea. Please take care of me too. Bye then.”

Click, Hiyori’s voice was cut-off.

To relax my taut body, I gave a big sigh of relief.

Inadvertently, looking at the entrance, I felt an odd urge to breathe the outside air. I walked along the corridor, put on my worn-off shoes and walked out the entrance, the cool air filled with the scent of the summer grass blew by.

I was walking along the narrow road in front of the house while looking at the dark blue night sky. The big full moon was glowing, the street lamps along the small village road were — — enlightening.

Summer was coming. The adventure that only we knew about was just around the corner.

Still excited, I quietly poured my expectations to the full moon far away, wishing that the upcoming summer would become an unforgettable memory.

Children Record 1

The stretcher that was making loud noises swiftly passed in front of my eyes.

I was kind of surprised by being this close to it, but the situation at the moment was so serious that nothing else mattered, thus I gave it no more than a mere glance.

But the thing the stretcher was carrying might have been the heaviest, yet the weakest thing I've ever seen.

It was the reason all of this was so troublesome for the hospital. They had to face "that thing".

The torture of trying to understand the horror of death in your numb everyday life. That's the kind of thing it was.

How much time had already passed from that moment?

Maybe because the running was so sudden, my "slightly stronger than burdocks" legs started to shiver and tremble. I didn't think they'd be that useful, although only for a limited time.

Well, that's a given. The only time I'd use my legs in my usual life was when I went to the toilet or the bathroom. Then all of a sudden using these legs of mine for going to the department store and the amusement park, and lastly, running with all my might. I bet anyone would feel exactly like me after such an experience.

Anyway, what was going on inside that brat's mind? Wait no; I'll *never* understand what's on her mind. More importantly, I don't even want to know all of her playful, evil thoughts.

However, this little brat made me incapable of not worrying about her today. On the way back from the amusement park she suddenly said "Can you catch up to that guy?!" and made me chase after an ambulance, when we finally reached the hospital even said "Can you leave me alone with him for a while?" and had my phone passed to a *complete stranger*, and then I was brought to some unknown place, and seriously. It was just ridiculous.

And then, this was the situation: me standing in front of the examination room into which the unknown kid was brought, thinking about a whole lot of questions, unable to go anywhere at all, simply waiting for supposedly the kid's guardian who had taken Ene away to return.

I sat down smoothly as if everything was fine, but the more I thought about it, the more I thought that my existence there didn't exactly have the right timing. I didn't even know the kid, didn't have anything to do with him, I was simply sitting there, waiting.

If the kid's parents were here now I'm sure they'd ask me "what's with you?" and then I'd respond with a gloomy grin, saying "nope nope it's nothing....."

I've had enough lately. I'd already gotten used to Ene's queer actions that made my head spin, but she'd gone waaay overboard those last few days. I wanted to go home after that brat's return and go back to living my usual life, but would the Mekakushi Dan even allow me to do so?

Just thinking about all this troublesome stuff piled up was enough to make my head hurt.

"This is totally absurd....."

"Haaa." I sighed.

"A really absurd thing is happening around me.... Seriously...."

All of a sudden, someone right beside me, as if joining me, sighed "haa" and muttered, shocking me so much that I bounced up from my seat.

"Woahhwahhh!!! You, since when have you been here!?"

As I turned my head, sitting there, the white-haired teenager whom I had passed Ene to lifted his head and made a clueless expression.

"Sorry.... I"

The teenage guy seemed to think I was angry at him and apologized with a slow intonation.

However, his expression didn't change at all except he seemed even dumber and less worried than back then. I on the other hand, thinking "What is that brat trying to say" and not responding immediately caused several intervals of silence in our conversation.

"Eh? Ahh, it's fine.... It's not about you, it was all this brat's fault."

The guy looked at the screen of my phone that he had been holding for quite a while and that familiar blue-haired girl floating in the screen was pouting and sulking.

"Yea. Is there something on your mind, Master?"

She was still pouting while floating in the screen and didn't look at me at all.

"Ah no, I was just wondering when will you be willing to come back. Anyway, who the hell is this guy? Isn't he someone you know?"

I was being dragged around while not knowing about what was happening. So I thought finding the cause of all this wouldn't be the wrong thing to do.

That was the reason I posed my question, but I wasn't sure why she switched on the phone vibration and glared at me severely when I was questioning her.

The glare she gave me was something I had never seen on her usual playful self, but for some unknown reason it was an unbelievable sight I knew I had seen before, somewhere.

Towards me who was a bit timid at that moment, Ene pouted again and muttered.

"It was a mistake. I don't know him. I already apologized for making you run this much. Let's go home."

The way Ene said this furiously exposed the truth. The white-haired guy's blank expression darkened, and it seemed as if he thought it was his fault again.

"I, say you..... It can't be helped if you say you've mistaken a person for someone else, but you actually stopped someone whose relative is in the ER, so was it really merely a misunderstanding?"

"That's because..... Well... aaaAAAHHH~ YOU'RE SO ANNOYING!!! Didn't I tell you it was a mistake?! No wonder Master isn't very popular!!"

Ene shouted, scaring the white-haired guy who only shook his shoulders slightly, but still didn't change his expression.

Was he shocked or what? That attitude of his that made it impossible for anyone to see what's on his mind made him seem as dull as a robot.

"That.... I'm sorry. I think this child is angry because of me. I think."

The white-haired guy looked over with his blank face, and spoke with an apologizing-like intonation.

“She was crying while saying things like ‘I miss you’ and ‘I thought you were dead’, but I didn’t understand anything…… I think she kind of misunderstood something.”

20 seconds seemed to pass from the moment he started talking until the moment he stopped. I didn’t know whether it was because I’ve gotten used to Ene’s babbling or was it because his speech was so slow that made me feel like time had slowed down.

I see. I think it's because this guy looks like a friend of Ene's.

It’s true that he somehow gave off an unstable atmosphere. If he were to be Ene’s friend, at least I could’ve accepted that oddness.

However, I was more worried about my phone that had been vibrating ever since the guy stopped talking.

As I timidly glanced at the screen, there laid Ene who wasn’t in her usual pure blue form. Instead, her ears went bloody red and she was vibrating non-stop.

“You, you, why-”

“UWAHHHHHH!!! UWAHHHH!! YOU'RE ANNOYING!!! IT'S NOTHING, JUST SHUT UP!!!!!!”

The scene froze for a moment. I could faintly see that the guy shook his shoulders again, but with his expression still remaining unchanged.

Even me who was used to this brat’s talking, froze as it was the first time seeing Ene showing her feelings to that extent.

Ene was laying on the screen, hugging her head while kicking with her legs, but then she suddenly stood up like she’d just realized something and smiled at me with cold sweat.

“……Please, Master?”

I wasn’t sure if she was trying to hide her uncontrolled actions or simply trying to act as usual, but the dead silence in the air slowly floated away.

Obviously not in a very good mood, Ene’s face turned red once again.

“Technical problems…?”

I knocked on the phone and it vibrated as if trying to show how much it hated that.

“What do you think I am??? It’s not what you think!!!!”

Ene shouted noisily in surprise.

She seems healthy enough. It's not like there's a virus, I guess it's due to a cold..... Wait no; this brat can't get a cold at all.

Although she had always been a weird brat, her weirdness seemed to have gotten worse that day.

“It-it isn’t wrong to occasionally have a moment of utter confusion right!!? It’s because he looked like a friend of mine back then, so.... Well, was it because I said something weird, or recalled a lot of things from the past....? Is it because I’ve unwarily been waiting for something.....?”

“No, I don’t know what the heck you’re talking about. Long story short? He looked like some boyfriend of yours, therefore you got emotional?”

When I finished, Ene, who had been awkwardly saying weird stuff, suddenly shut her mouth tightly, looked speechless, surprised, and gave me a confused look.

“Ah~ I think I really know why Master isn’t popular now. Perhaps you’ll stay alone forever. I think it’s not that bad. (Monotone voice)”

“Ehhh?! Did I actually say something really bad?!? Also, why exactly aren’t I popular!? TELL ME!!”

“Ah, please don’t talk to me for a while, you pathetic creature”

“OH NO, I JUST HEARD YOU SAY ‘PATHETIC’ DIDN’T I!!! Even if you just mention it casually I can still hear it, okay!!”

“You’re freaking noisy!! In short, even I have things that I can’t tell you, Master.....”

Just when she pouted and wanted to say something, there was a huge sound coming from the examination room in which the boy who had been tightly hugged by the white-haired guy was.

Not long after, clattering noise of metal objects hitting the ground could be heard.

“.....?! Master! This isn’t good!”

“I know...!”

Crossing the corridor, I hurriedly opened the examination room door, seeing the boy who had been brought in laying on the floor.

Messy blond hair and a white vest, from the back he looked like he was around 11 years old. Thermometers and medical devices were scattered all over the floor and at the center of it all the boy was unsuccessfully trying to support his knees to stand up.

“Hey, hey, watcha’ doin’!! I don’t know what’s going on, but you’ll need to lie down first.....!”

I squatted beside the boy to lend him a hand, but he pushed it away as if afraid.

The first time I saw his face from up front it was wetted with tears. Inside his watery eyes there seemed to be hatred for something cruel he suffered from, bringing out a dark and heavy feeling.

“Who are you..... don’t.... try to stop me....!”

The boy stood up, his body still wobbly, but yet he managed to stabilize his pace and head towards the exit on his own.

“Hiyori..... I need to get to Hiyori.....”

The boy muttered like in a dream and walked out of the room without listening to anyone’s words.

I caught up quickly. Right after stepping out the room, the boy came face-to-face with the white-haired guy.

“It’s all your fault..... None of this would have happened if you didn’t exist.....”

Said the boy while giving the guy a hateful glare and there were tears falling from his eyes yet again.

The white-haired guy took it all in and gave a seemingly confused look, but just kept standing there and said nothing.

“That’s it..... I must go..... Have to go.....”

The moment he uttered those words the boy swiftly changed the direction of his body and ran away with a shocking momentum. Not long after, the boy running through the dim hospital corridor disappeared in the dark.

“Ma-Master, what are you doing??!! If you don’t chase that boy he’ll be in danger!!”

"Oh oh oh. I know. Ah, my legs can't do it anymore....."

That's right, just at that urging moment my "slightly stronger than celery" legs started to tremble miserably.

"DAAAAAHHHH!!! SERIOUSLY! MASTER, ARE YOU A FAWN??!! Why are you so useless at this kind of important moment.....!"

"Sh-shut up!! To tell the truth it's all your fault!! DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MY SLIM BODY!!"

As we were bringing up this useless argument, the boy had already gone far ahead.

I was afraid that according to his speed he could escape the hospital compound in just a few minutes. After that he'd be out on the open. Then we wouldn't know where he is at all.

"Call the nurse.... but I guess it's already too late for that..... I say, can you at least do something!? Although it looks like you are hiding something, still, he's your relative isn't he??!! If this goes on we'll lose track of him!!"

Facing my question, the white-haired guy nodded with a confused face and spoke with a slightly faster yet still slow and steady intonation.

"Hibiya is quite angry at me.....

"I have to do something..... C-can you come with me?"

The flow of events seemed a bit messed up, but I assumed Hibiya was the name of the boy who had just run away.

Seems that the guy also had his own sense for danger. When he said "come with me" his calm expression looked slightly different as his eyes contained faint traces of enthusiasm.

"Oh oh, no no I don't mind coming with you, just that my legs aren't very convenient at the moment....."

"What's up with saying your legs are inconvenient all the time, Master? You're just a slob who's lacking exercise, aren't you."

"No matter what you say, right now, I really can't run..... Uhm, eh?"

As if he wanted to cover up my sentence, the white-haired guy appeared in front of me and I felt a pressured floating sensation which I hadn't experienced for years.

“WoahwOOAAAHHH?!!”

As if playing upsy-daisy with a baby, the guy picked me up effortlessly and carried me on his shoulder.

“Sorry, this might hurt a little....”

After saying that with a low voice, accompanied by a sonic boom and an impact, my view of the corridor started moving backwards with an extremely high speed.

The guy half-squatted and jumped over meters and meters in that pose, and I took freaking 1.5 seconds to realize what was going on.

I couldn't make a sound for a moment, but after looking at the situation again, I miserably screamed from the bottom of my lungs.

“P-p-p-p-put me down.... UPPU!!”

I was trying hard to say something, but was cut off by the huge landing impact, causing air to gush from my mouth and replace my words.

“S-sorry, please be patient for a while”

The next moment I wasn't looking at the high-speed movement of the corridor anymore, but it was the ground that was suddenly far away from me. Realizing what an extremely big leap it was, I nearly fainted.

I tried to hold onto my intentions and looked at my phone that I'd been grabbing tightly. Ene was using a cushion-like thing to cover her head, shutting her eyes, as if to protect herself from the next impact.

While I was shouting, the air was cut off as we jumped into a cool-air space. The hospital rooftop lay beneath my eyes. The ajar dormer that we jumped out of had already become small.

I wonder if that's how it feels to skydive. No, to be exact, it felt almost the same as being on the roller coaster I had ridden earlier that day, my current darkest fear.

So, I was afraid that once I landed on the ground I'd end up like I did after the roller coaster ride.

“Found him....!”

The guy whispered. He removed me from his shoulder - maybe to soften the landing for me - and proceeded to carry me under his arm.

Then, the sense of weightlessness struck me again, but this time the ground was approaching with an incredibly high speed.

My brain started reciting “At any rate, falling from this height will kill me. THANKS.” and prayed to God, then, much like what Ene did back then, tightly shut my eyes.

“THUMP!!” the loud sound was accompanied by a strong sense of regained gravity. The impact itself was lighter than expected. Still, it was enough of an impact for my stomach that had been stimulated by the big flight, causing it to roll and mix up and down. Once the shock of the landing released me, the guy asked worriedly:

“Are you okay?”

“HaaaAAAh!!!”

Instead of a response to the expressed concern, me, who was still being hugged, gave a big sigh of relief.

“U.... uuuooo.....”

Annndd as usual, I puked. Despair.



“Kyaah!!! So gross, don’t come near me!!!” “Haaa..... Haa.... No, you should’ve been at least a little concerned about me

“Sorry, but I had to do it fast. I’m sorry for startling you....”

Jumping meters and meters just to be faster while carrying a fully grown guy, how many people of this type even exist in this world?

I slipped from under the guy’s arm and stood up, wobbling while looking at his face. I noticed that the eyes of the poker-faced guy were flashing in some kind of bright pink color.

“Your eyes.....your body has something too, huh. What’s going on, seriously?”

From the color of his eyes and his unusual actions I accepted the possibility that he also had a power, just like Momo and the Mekakushi Dan.

I’ve gotten kind of used to this phenomena due to Momo and Ene, but it seriously didn’t seem right to meet all these people several times within one day.

Speaking of it, what was up with those eyes? I think it is better not to investigate it too much out of curiosity.....

“Who are you.....?”

“Master!! Isn’t that child already out of the hospital??!!”

I stopped thinking and quickly looked in the direction Ene pointed at. On the long road in front of the hospital’s main entrance there was the running boy.

And that boy was very close to exiting the hospital compound.

“Hibiya.... We’ll lose him if this goes on...!”

The guy grabbed my arm as if he wanted to carry me again.

“GAHHH!!! NONONONONO!!! I CAN’T TAKE IT ANYMORE!! I beg of you, please, LET ME GO!!!”

“S-sorry, I won’t do it again....”

As I rejected, the guy quivered and released his hold of me. I successfully avoided another screaming comical act, it was true however that the boy would run onto the streets if this went on. It’d be troublesome if that happened.

“No, I can’t. I’m scared to do it alone so I can’t... Uu....”

The guy did an action completely unimaginable for someone with a tough demeanor and weakly bowed his head.

I looked at the boy running towards the front door once again and knew that even if I tried to chase him down my legs wouldn’t work at all.

Just when I was about to give up I suddenly remembered something. I quickly talked to my phone.

“Hey, Ene! Call Momo!!”

“Eh? Call Little Sister? Ah! I see!! Roger that!!”

Showing she understood my intentions, Ene clapped her hands and used her right hand to draw a cross, then the screen changed to dialing mode to call Momo.

About 2.5 seconds passed before a big green “CALLING” sign appeared on the screen.

“Ah~ Hey, is that you, Onii-chan? Are you done with Ene’s stuff~?”

“It’s done, but now there’s something else to do... Momo, where are you now?”

“Eh? Uhmm~ Let’s see.... Where are we, Leader? Oh, thanks. Ah, Onii-chan? I’m now~ in front of the hospital? Under the tree beside..... Argh, what’s up with that kid? Running so fast-”

“Heyy!!! Stop that kid from running away right now!! Please!!”

“EHHH??? WHYYY??!!”

“IT’S URGENT!!! PLEASEEE!!!”

“URGENT?!! Uhm~ OKAY..... Got it! I’ll give it a shot!!”

Momo hanged up, the screen displayed a red “END OF CALL” sign.

“This won’t be a problem for Little Sister, right?”

“She might be stupid but she’s very active...”

“Yeah.... maybe a little stupid....”

I saw the boy was about to pass through the main entrance.

When he was just about to reach the destination, he staggered like he bumped into something.

When in the next moment Momo suddenly appeared in the empty spot, the boy was shocked and tried to defend himself, but was pressed down heavily by Momo and thus completely immobilized. “Woah!!! Good job Little Sister!! Ah~ ah~ but she hugged him so tightly.....”

“She has somehow become a good cushion. Alright, if we don’t catch up now...”

“The one who’s being slow is only you, Master.”

I ignored Ene and quickened my pace. When I finally reached the entrance, there was Momo, hugging the boy tightly. Meanwhile, he was struggling to escape her as he was nearly being suffocated.

“Ah, Onii-chan! What’s going on, seriously..... Ouch, that hurt! Don’t move, you.....”

“Sorry, Momo. Hey, you there! I’m not sure what’s going on but can you at least calm down!? Your sudden escape from the hospital caused people to worry!!”

“Eeehhh!?? This child is a patient!?”

Momo released her grip, maybe out of surprise, and the boy escaped from her arms. His face went red as he took a deep breath, then gasped and glared at Momo.

“Waddaya think you’re doing, you fat lady! Don’t suddenly jump out of nowhere and grab me!!”

Momo, whose reaction was slow, made a blurry face at first, but as soon as she grasped the meaning of his words, became red-faced.

“H- HUHHH??!! F-f-f-fat lady..... WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY??!!!!”

“I mean it, you big fat lady!! I’m in a hurry.....”

The boy was about to make another run for it but Momo swiftly grabbed the boy’s hood and pulled him back.

"I-I say you..... You're a patient aren't you?!! Of course running away isn't the right thing to do!! A-and I'm no-not f-fa-fat"

Perhaps it was too big of a strike for her: Momo's body started to tremble and her breathing was off-beat.

The boy glared at her once again, took off his hood and shouted at Momo:

"As I said.....!! Don't try to stop me!!! And also I'm not a patient, there's nothing wrong with me!! As for you auntie, I think you should have a doctor check your cow-like body!! It's definitely a disease."

So said the boy as he pointed towards Momo's boobs or somewhere nearby, Ene was laughing from my phone "Pfft.... Ahh, sorry", and a broken sound could be heard from Momo: "S-someone is worried about you, yet you!!!!!! YOU.....!"

Being bullied by the boy almost made her cry. Just when the red-faced Momo was about to rush and seize him, this time it was her hood that was pulled back by something invisible, stopping her from attacking.

"L-let me go, Leader! T- THIS CHILD IS OUR ENEMY, OH YES, OUR ENEMY!!!

MEKAKUSHI DAN EMERGENCY DISPATCH!!! Let~ me~ go~ ARGHH~~

.....!!!!!!"

Momo was struggling like a mad cow, and combined with what the boy had said I couldn't help but to let out a little chuckle, but it seemed that Momo heard me and glared at me sharply.

"Whatcha' laughing at, Onii-chan!? What's up with that kid?! Why is he calling me that?!"

"Ah~ I know I know. Sorry, just calm down first. Hey, your name is Hibiya, right? Why are you in such a hurry? Can't you go later?"

Hibiya didn't try to run away after listening to my questions, instead he turned to me, without trying to cover the hostility on his face. He said dismissively:

"..... There's this girl, perhaps she's already dead now. Someone important to me. I was the only one saved. So now it's up to me to save her."

Hearing Hibiya say all that caused everyone to hold their breath.

Even Momo who had been noisy before stopped squirming and opened her mouth in surprise.

"W-wait a minute. Dead as in..... as in saying you two were involved in some kind of accident? If that's the case, it's better to discuss this matter with the police or the doctors first, right? Where are you going all alone?"

Before I rushed to the hospital, I hadn't seen any signs of a car accident at the place where Hibiya fainted. His body had no obvious wounds, so from an outsider's point of view he simply fainted due to heatstroke.

That's what I thought it was at first, too.

Still, from what Hibiya had said, it was clear that it wasn't merely a sudden occurrence, but more like some kind of incident. If that was truly the case, he should've discussed this with the police.

"No matter how much I try to explain this, no one will believe. Oh yeah, if you want proof, just ask that guy. He just stood there and watched it all happen."

The boy pointed at the guy who was starting to look anxious and clenched his shirt.

"Hey, you were there watching everything, weren't you? If you couldn't do anything, why don't you at least try to explain yourself?"

"No, that's not it! I also wanted to save her.... but... but... I had no choice...!" Said the guy, while the boy kept gritting his teeth, staring at him using an even sharper glare.

The guy lowered his gaze as if he couldn't take it anymore.

The boy sighed softly and again showed signs of wanting to pass through the entrance.

"..... Fine. If you can't do anything, I'll just go by myself. Don't stop..... me....."

The boy was just about to take a step forward when his body suddenly wobbled, tilted forward and headed towards the ground defenselessly.

"O-oi!"

I wanted to rush over to hold the boy but the distance between us was too great. Even the guy who had just shown such shocking actions earlier reacted two times slower than me, as if frozen in place by the boy's words.

The boy didn't show any signs of resistance and seemed like he was about to hit the ground.

"Dammit.....!"

Just when I thought it was too late, Hibiya's body looked like it was hanging on an invisible rope and just stopped in mid-air in an upright position.

I didn't realize what was going on immediately, but after looking at Momo who had lost her balance and had fallen to the ground, I understood.

"Shintaro, this fellow.... It's better not to send him back to the hospital."

The air around Hibiya suddenly shook and wobbled, at the same time Kido, who was wearing her purple parka with her head hidden under her hood, appeared.

Hiding under the hood with her long hair, Kido's face showed mixed feelings of surprise and anxiety.

"Nice catch..... Say, what did you mean by that? It's obvious that the boy's condition has worsened. Well, it does look like quite a bad situation. Anyway, it's better to leave him with the doctors or the police, right?"

"..... No, I'm afraid even the doctors or the police are useless. As for this fella's current condition, I think the only ones who can help him are us."

Kido was looking at Hibiya in her arms while making an expression as if she had bitten something bitter.

As I was walking beside Kido, I glanced over at the boy's face and in his partially opened eyes I saw traces of bloody red seeping out, mixing with the original color of his irises.

What's going on?

"Oi, this is....."

"Ah, I know what you're trying to say. The situation is pretty troublesome now."

Kido responded like she'd remembered something abominable.

The change in the color of the boy's irises was definitely the characteristic of when Kido and the others used "some kind of power".

Perhaps what Kido meant by saying “even the doctors or the police are useless” is because of this. It’s true that none of them would be able to easily accept an unusual and rare symptom like this one, I think.

“Then, what do we do right now.....? Is he going to be okay!?”

“For now, we still don’t know what the kid’s power is...If we let him go back it’d be dangerous. In any case, we should bring him back to the base first.”

Kido’s hand supported Hibiya’s waist firmly and she hugged him properly with his head resting on her shoulder.

“Alright, Kisaragi. You tell Kano to space out a bed. Oh, and if Mary is afraid it’ll be troublesome, please let her stay in the room with Seto.



Upon hearing Kido's request, Momo, who had previously been sitting firmly on the ground, immediately stood up and gave a salute. "O-okay! Roger that!"

"Haha.... you're so stiff"

Kido gave a dazed expression, then a rare smile. Her eyes have normally had a sharp glare in them, but when she smiled it was a really warm smile that revealed her motherly traits.

"Oh, yes. What's your name?"

Kido, still hugging Hibiya, suddenly thought of something and turned to Konoha.

"M-me? Konoha. That's the name. I think."

Perhaps he didn't mean it to be that way, but his usual incredibly slow manner of speaking made his self-introduction seem pretty sloppy.

When the guy said his name, the smartphone in my hand started vibrating again, and on the screen Ene was wearing an angry expression again and was kicking around with her legs.

"I see, Konoha. From what I heard just now, I guess we can lend a hand with the "incident" that involved you two. Anyway, we'll be taking care of this child before he becomes stable. Listen to me, you wanna come with us?"

As Kido said that, Konoha made the most serious face I had ever seen and nodded.

"It's a yes, huh. Alright, let's go.... but I'm kind of hungry now. I should leave it to Kano to prepare dinner..... Hey, Kisaragi. Did you contact Kano?"

"No, I couldn't reach him at all, so I'm calling Seto right now..... Ah! Hello, this is Momo!"

I guess Seto did pick up the phone. Even though she couldn't see the other side, Momo still stood straightly and spoke.

"Pardon me, there's something going on here. There'll be a patient coming to the base, so I was thinking if Kano could spare a bed for..... eh? He's not in? Uhm..... Okay, I understand! Ah, besides that there's making dinner..... and also, after that, please stay in the room with Mary! Well then, goodbye!"

She rushed at the last part, so did she even tell Seto everything properly?

After hanging up, Momo gave a sigh of relief as if some strategy she had come up with succeeded.

“Sorry for troubling you, Momo. And, did Kano go somewhere?”

“Ah, yes. He kind of left a message ‘I won’t be back tonight’ and just went away.”

“Haa..... That dude is really useless when it comes to important moments like this one....”

I remembered Ene saying a similar thing before and my heart began to cramp.

Speaking of it, I wonder what Kano’s up to, going out at this kind of time. For someone with an aloof attitude like his, having a lot of friends wouldn’t be a big surprise. So he went out for a night with his friends, I guess. Dammit..... He’s even younger than me.....

“Let’s go then. From here to there might not be far away, we gotta be faster.”

Kido’s eyes revealed a gleam of red again. I guess she was using it because of Momo.

I still didn’t completely understand her power, but I knew she made it so that no one could see us and that was kind of unbelievable.

“Uhm, Master,”

After leaving the building everybody followed Kido closely. Suddenly, my phone vibrated quieter than usual.

“Ah? What is it?”

The Ene I saw on the screen was different from before: she was floating there with a gloomy expression like she was deeply immersed in her thoughts.

“Uhm..... Shouldn’t we go home faster? With Little Sister. I just feel a bit worried. As if something bad is going to happen.....”

Ene voiced a rare negative thought and awkwardly rubbed her shirt, creasing it slightly.

Usually the brat would say things like “Jump over it, Master!” if there was a ring of fire in front of me, so there was clearly something wrong with her that day.

“Huh? If you look at it from the beginning it was all actually your fault. Hey, although I really want to go home, too.....”

“If, If that’s the case, then.....!”

“Mm-hmm, but I’m a bit concerned about the child myself, and Momo doesn’t seem like she’d want to go home either. Anyway, I don’t think that Leader would easily agree with us leaving.”

“I-I see.....”

Ene looked powerless and depressed. I was thinking what she was trying to say when I suddenly realized something.

“Ah, don’t tell me you...!”

“Eh eh eh??!! No! Of course not!! Ene is still... Ene, okay?! I’m not what you think! Master, you’re really nasty, seriously.....”

“So you’re worried that you’ll run out of battery?”

“.....Huh?”

Ene had said a lot of weird things, but when I posed the question she just opened her mouth without saying anything and looked stunned.

Then suddenly her expression changed into a smile. She clumsily waved her hands.

“.....Ah, ah~ charging the battery, yes, that’s it~! Once the battery’s low I become tired, how frustrating!”

“Uh-huh! It’s just what I thought! Hey I’ll recharge you as soon as we get back to the hideout, so cheer up, okay?”

So the problem was with the battery, huh? Maybe because she had wasted a lot at the amusement park, the screen did show that there was a lot less power remaining...

I don’t know what she needs to stay active, but if her weird self returns after I charge the battery, I’ll be relieved.

If I don’t take care of her she’ll just do something even weirder. I wouldn’t be able to stand something like that.

“Ahaha..... haa. Speaking of which, I kinda think that Master.... has changed a little”

“Ah? Really? I’m not sure of it myself....”

"Looks like you had a lot of fun today. Isn't it great, making friends?"

"Huuu? Are those people really my friends? I just feel like they've been leading me by the nose"

I felt kind of defensive about considering them as my friends after knowing them for no more than one day.

Yet it was true, they were pretty good to get along with.

They'd lend a hand to a normal boy and even try to solve his problems, so they were really good people for this era.

"Isn't that great? Master can even get along with people who are leading you by the nose."

Ene gave a gentle, yet lonely smile.

Suddenly, a smile I knew I had seen before unexpectedly passed through my mind. A smile I had once lost. A smile that had always been kept somewhere deep inside my brain.

"I guess it really is."

I didn't want to forget it, so I locked the smile away somewhere, to the same place I always did.

"Of course it is! Ah, by the way, I've always thought that I'm a really tough girl, don't you think so too? Are you obsessed with me or what?"

"Nono, first of all, do you really fall into the "girl" category?"

"EH EHHH?!!! You're too much, Master!! Aren't I a super girl!? Young and pretty, right!?"

Facing Ene, who had once returned to her usual talkative self, I decided I should get back quickly to charge the battery for her and slightly sped up my pace.

In the shaking train, a slightly cold yet still pleasant wind was blowing through the partially open window.

Gazing at the scenery from the window, it wasn't just groups of mountains like back then; it was now packed with hard grey objects that seemingly advocated the development of civilization.

"Yaaaa... This is great. Kinda."

I couldn't resist raising my voice. Well, I couldn't be blamed, since I had never experienced such an exciting summer vacation before.

The world beyond the village I lived in was way greater and more charming than what I had expected.

Sceneries that could only be seen on the TV on the other side of the window, like they were neatly placed in a cupboard, kept on inciting my curiosity.

And the most important thing, the existence that makes my heart beat loudly is right in front of me.

"Gross. What's so good about this scenery? Is there something wrong with your head?"

"Eheheh. Don't you think this is exciting? UWAHH! That building is SO BIG! Hey Hiyori did you see that?!"

"Ah~ annoying, just annoying. There was a time I found all that impressive, too, but now I'm already sick of seeing these kinds of things."

Opposite of my seat, Hiyori was using her usual cool attitude and was looking out the window like me.

Ahh, I feel like taking a photo of this scene.

Before leaving, I knelt down and begged and finally got my father's permission to borrow his SLR camera.

I heard the little thing under the seat whispering vaguely "hey it's my time now, right?"

No matter what kind of moment it is, as long as Hiyori's there, the picture is perfect.

"I'm really looking forward to it. Anyway, I have SOOO many places I would like to go to.

Then! Where shall we start?"

"Start, huh..... Isn't it fine to just shop around the streets? Since this scenery makes you so excited, I guess that'll be enough for you."

Without turning to look at me, Hiyori kept on staring at the scenery she'd just referred to a 'boring'.

"That, that means we're going together...?"

"Huh? Why should I go with you? While I'm out, you can just go around town on your own"

"Ah, em....."

As usual, I couldn't incite Hiyori's interest, and our dialogue ended just like that.

After the night I talked to Hiyori on the phone, I had completely misunderstood our relationship and thought we were close. The situation cleared up the next day in the school corridor when I greeted her "Good Morning! Today's weather is great, isn't it!" and was given the cold shoulder, and thus became the laughing stock of the crowd.

That's right, Hiyori didn't particularly look up to me or anything, but it was only because it "seemed that I could be easily bossed around" that I was in the end invited on a trip with her during the summer vacation.

And of course I had never had a conversation with her in school before. In the days before our trip, the only way to communicate with Hiyori were just the irregular phone calls by her. That was the cruel reality.

Naturally, to prevent the phone calls from Hiyori from being dashed, I would constantly sit in the corridor of my house and wait.

There could be a whole week without any calls from her, but there were also times when she'd call me twice in one day.

Although all the phone calls had transactional content, those dialogues became marked so deeply in my brain that I could remember them whole If I closed my eyes.

The quiet battle of getting here was tough and hard, and if I were to describe it precisely, it'd be a really long story. And also, if I said that my mom was worried about me at first, yet in the end she made me some tea and uttered the striving words "it's been tough for you", could anyone even understand what had actually happened?

Well, to let that kind of parents accept my wish, I wasted a lot of energy.

The first night when I told my father "*I want to go to the city during this summer vacation*", I ended up being locked outside the house, trembling among the howling of the wild dogs, deeply feeling the taste of creepiness. So, I thought "*This can't be it, I have to find a decent excuse*", and came up with an extremely clever idea of "attending summer vacation tuition classes", then took another chance with my parents.

However, my parents' response was "*If you wanna study, then do it at home*" and again I was thrown into the wilderness where I kindly accepted the severe trial of the raccoons.

Later on, I brainstormed, searched for a lot of info and finally came up with this ultimate-to-the-max reason: "In the whole Japan, the one and only school where I can learn about Indian tradition which I don't really know much about is in the city, and the books on the subject are only sold there, too, therefore I have to go".

My final negotiation with my parents dragged on until 3 o'clock in the morning, and to convince my stubborn father, I had to state things like "I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING EXCEPT INDIA NOW" and "IF YOU WANNA STOP ME THEN YOU'LL HAVE TO ELIMINATE THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF INDIA FIRST!" After all my ridiculous-to-the-max words, my father let out a sentence "It's my fault for raising you the wrong way", and FINALLY agreed to let me go to town.

And so, I'm currently "a boy who has an unusual interest in investigating the traditions in India which he does not understand one bit". With a status of a half-severed relationship with my parents, I exist here and now.

I was the one who started all this downright self-esteem lowering nonsense, but the one who surprised me was Hiyori.

It was way too embarrassing to say that I did all those things for her sake, so I sort of gave a mentality that could've ruined Hiyori's image of me and announced "It's just that I've had a huge interest in learning about Indian traditions from a professional society since long ago, so my parents agreed with me going". Hiyori reacted with "That's good. I like investigating stuff too", which was by far the best response I had ever gotten out of her.

She really has a hobby of this unexpected sort? That quote changed my life and was alone enough to compensate for all my sacrifices. Of course I recorded the part where she said "I like", and will keep it inside the completed "Voiced Hiyori" which will be guarding my room the times I won't be in.

Drowning in my memories, I didn't notice that the train was reaching the huge platform.

The platform was crowded, as if a huge event was being held there.

"Ah, hurry up, we gotta get off at the next stop, Hibiya"

"Eh?! Ah, yeah!"

I replied, and stood up from my seat.

After I finally moved Hiyori's massive luggage from the luggage holder above the seats, I put on my backpack which was obviously smaller compared to the luggage, and went into a ready status.

"Alright! We're getting off any minute!"

When the train suddenly slowed down, an inertial force appeared in my legs.

I tried to stand firmly so I wouldn't fall, but when the train stopped the inertia vanished immediately, and I tumbled on my back.

"Uwahh..."

"Huh, what are you doing? Hurry up, we're going now"

Hiyori looked at me and sighed, then neatly stood up and rushed to the door.

"U-uwahh wait.... wait for me!"

I hurriedly dragged Hiyori's luggage as I walked towards the door myself.

From the moment the door opened, the world I saw were countless crowds mixed together, releasing a pressure that made me feel like they'll squash me to death.

Hiyori relaxingly rushed to the platform, meanwhile, I was trying my best to catch up to her.

Drawing along the rough yellow lines on the floor with the wheels of Hiyori's luggage, I finally went up the escalator. My breathing became quite rapid.

"Hey..... Hiyori. Is there some kind of event today.....?"

"Hmm~? Nope, I don't think so. If it was the Summer Festival, it would be a little later in the day."

Hiyori replied while fiddling the smartphone in her hand.

“Eh, eh~ I see...”

So is this the so-called ultimate trial of the city.

I had once watched the TV about the thing called “the commuter rush” and was sneering at it, thinking “their acting is really exaggerated”, but based on the current situation, it seemed pretty accurate.

“Please don’t tell me it will be the same situation on the next train.” The thought sent a chill down my spine.

Maybe because I wasn’t used to it yet, when the escalator was nearing the lower level, my heart became filled with an unusual tension.

“Getting off.... Getting off now.”

I was ready to get off the escalator, but I couldn’t find the perfect timing, so my steps ended up being weird and clumsy.

“How spiritual”

Hiyori who got down first laughed at me, but I was so embarrassed that I couldn’t lift my head.

Next time, I should practice before a ride with Hiyori.

We walked towards the ticket barrier where gathered an even bigger crowd than at the platform. I was thinking that if we got mixed in the crowd, our trip would really be quite an adventure.

Hiyori hurried ahead without waiting for me as she normally did, but since I also had a ticket of my own, I thought getting on the next train wouldn’t be a problem as long as I’d just imitate the person in front of me.

It was my first time seeing an automatic ticket barrier that had turned human conductors into a thing of the past.

This will really check the ticket properly? I felt that there might be one or two people who could sneak through it.

When it was almost my turn, I intently observed the hand actions of the person in front of me, just make sure I won’t make any mistake.

That person took something out and placed it on the machine that beeped, then calmly passed thought the ticket barrier.

I see, so that's the system. The train station at my ol' home was run by a good ol' uncle who cut the tickets one by one, so this was indeed the city. Although I still couldn't understand, I knew it was really high-tech.

It was my turn, after I made sure the machine wasn't jammed, I placed the ticket on the machine just like the previous person did, and moved forward.

But, along with the ear-piercing electronic sound "BEEPP—", as if it was going to grab me and kill me, the board suddenly appeared.

"U-UWAHHHHHH!!!!!"

In this extremely unexpected situation, I couldn't resist screaming. As I was in danger I turned back in search for help, but the adults were just speechlessly watching me with confused expressions on their faces.

"W-Wah..... HIYORI! H-HELP ME!"

When a staff member was rushing over, Hiyori who had already walked quite a distance seemed stunned while she was looking at me, but when I called out her name, she blushed and lowered her sight.

"Haha, you okay, kid? You need to put the ticket in here"

According to the employee's directions, I stuffed the ticket into the ticket barrier. The high tension of the machine disappeared just like a dream and the board opened successfully.

"T-THANK YOU.....!"

I felt relieved that I was finally released, but I couldn't stand how the crowd was staring at me so I tried to sneak away. The person who was waiting for me was Hiyori, looking especially unhappy.

"Did you actually come here just to embarrass me...?"

Hiyori's face was burning with anger and giving the feeling it was accompanied by a thundering sound effect. I lamented a little:

"B-Because the previous person..... Well..... AAHHH, SORRY! I'll be more cautious next time..."

I desperately apologized. Maybe because being angry with me was too tiring for her, all Hiyori said to me was “*you have to cheer up, okay*” and then she ran off again.

After that, will I be able to successfully reach my destination without any accidents?

Just when I wanted to catch up, Hiyori turned her head towards me and stuck out her tongue, a gesture that from my point of view looked like she was saying “*Come n’ catch me.*”

“I’ll definitely catch you.....!”

Once again, I grabbed the handles of the luggage tightly, fixed my eyes on Hiyori who was about to disappear in the crowd, and took a big step forward.

*

Under the blazing hot sun, surrounded by the hot rays that I had never experienced before coming from all directions, the moment my life bar almost reached 0, we finally reached the front of a small red-bricked house.

“We’re here...? Are we FINALLY HERE.....?!”

“Of course we are. Are you stupid?”

After passing through the ticket barrier, I got myself squeezed in the unusually cramped crowd in the subway, and finally when I reached the surface, I was shocked by the large flow of cars, wanted to cross the road but was being confused by the the traffic lights which I couldn’t understand what they were directing me to do, it was all really embarrassing.

And also the sunlight.

The extremely offensive heat that I couldn’t imagine when I was in the village was decreasing my HP with an incredibly high speed.

“I..... kinda hate the city.”

“I see. But since you’re already here, there’s no choice but to cope with it” said Hiyori with a flawless poker face, wearing a cute sunshade without a drop of perspiration on her.

So this is the ultimate trial of the city..... This sentence that had already appeared in my brain four or five times that day made another appearance.

Still, since I'm so determined to live a happy city life with Hiyori, how can I expect Hiyori to turn back to look at me just because I mumble discouraging things about my surroundings?

If I give up now, I'm afraid I can't even go back alive.

Forget those negative thoughts. The moment this big door opens, our unforgettable life together will begin.

If in 2 weeks' time I still cannot get Hiyori to look at me, there won't be a second chance for me anymore.

That's not all; what remains of my long life will be wasted for the useless exploration of Indian tradition.

About this I really need to avoid.

I have to use up all my resources to catch her heart during the stay, and in the future she'll be my bride and then we'll live the rest of our lives together in India as monks.

That's all I want.

“Uhm~ Excuse~ me”

While I was drowning in my lame imagination, Hiyori started to call the interphonewithout caring about anything else.

“No, you don't need to press repeatedly.....”

“Eh? But no one has come to open the door yet. There isn't any choice, is there? Hell~ooo!”

Stubbornly ringing the doorbell without stopping, she looked exactly like a Yakuza who came to claim debt.

If it is such a small and cute Yakuza, I'd totally want her to come knocking on my door. Then, if possible, I'd like her to claim me.

“Hey, hey, Hiyori, did he go out or something?”

“Impossible. Unlike you, he wouldn't mess up the date and time we've promised.”

“No, I'm not saying that.....”

Hiyori kind of ignored my assumption and kept on calling furiously. At that moment, the sound of the door being unlocked came from the other side.

"Ah. I knew he was in. Speaking of it, it's been a long time since I last saw brother-in-law."

"U-uwahh..... I suddenly feel nervous"

After all, it was going to be the first time meeting my possibly-future-brother-in-law.

Of course, my heart started to beat loudly. *I have to look as awesome as I can.*

I straightened up my body, even the tips of my toes were infused with power as I was waiting for the door to open for around 30 seconds.

I could still hear sounds of the key turning in the lock from the door, but it didn't seem to open at all.

".....What's going on"

My body was slowly reaching its limit, as a side effect my body started to shiver.

I don't know whether it was because of the power infused into my face or not, but with my peripheral vision I saw that when Hiyori who was standing beside me glanced at me, she looked somewhat surprised, as if wanting to say "uwahh.....".

Patience, patience. Don't give brother-in-law a bad impression. MUST STAY AWESOME TO MEET HIM.

"Ka-cha" the carefree sound came and the door opened slowly.

"Huh. I don't know what's going on, but you finally opened the door. Seriously brother-in-law, what's up with you....."

Behind the door that was slightly ajar, there stood a white-haired teenager with drops of perspiration on his forehead, looking happily as if he had just achieved something.

He looked younger than the age I'd heard.

I remembered that the age difference between Hiyori and her sister was supposed to be quite big. If that was really the case and if the guy in front of us was really her brother-in-law, their marriage must have been a pretty distanced-aged one.

"S-sorry. I didn't know how to unlock....."

Didn't know how to unlock? What the hell? Is that something a person who's lived here for a long time would say?

Questions started to appear in my brain one by one.

No, no, wait. Stop thinking about that.

What if he really is Hiyori's brother-in-law?

If I use a rude attitude towards him it might affect my future.

“Y-your brother-in-law is really young, Hiyori.....”

I smiled and looked at her, but the Hiyori I saw was making a face that I had never seen before.

Her eyes were glowing like small diamonds and her cheeks were red like they were colored with plum pigment.

“SO COOL.....”

What Hiyori had said and the enviable gaze she was making was obviously aimed towards the white-haired guy.

“W-wwwwhhhHHHYYYY HIYORI?! EH? SAYING HE'S COOL?! B-BUT ISN'T HE YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW?!!!”

She shook her head at my question without moving her sight off of him.

“Nope. First time seeing him. AMAZING.....”

PA-CHA, I heard a ceramic furnisher drop down, breaking into pieces. *Long time no see, crazy Asahina fans who were buried with Hiyori's own hands.* After a long time, they once again came down from the sky naked and wanted to take me away. *What the hell is the problem now?*

This was definitely Hiyori's sister's house.

Then why is there someone Hiyori had never met before in the house? No. This guy looks totally suspicious.

Better way to put it, he IS.

Anyway, if I don't quickly eliminate him in front of Hiyori.....!

"I-I say, who are you!? This is Hiyori's brother-in-law's house, isn't it?! Why are you here?!"

Being asked the question in a rough manner, the guy just made a confused look.

A tall long body with handsome features, the more I looked at him, the more he pissed me off.

"Eh? Hiyori is..... Ah, sensei had once mentioned."

The guy looked like he understood, and walked from the hall towards Hiyori without his shoes on.

"Nice to meet you. My name is..... Uhm, I think it's Konoha."

"Ehhhh..... Oh my, what to do.....! Ah, nice to meet you! I'm Asahina Hiyori, sensei's..... Are you saying that you are my brother-in-law's student?"

"Eh? Hmm err..... you could say that"

"I knew it! So you have been staying in the house watching the door all the time? Looks like brother-in-law is really busy....."

"Yea, since you are here, come in"

No, wait. Why did the atmosphere become so happy all of a sudden? After talking to the guy named Konoha, as if she had met her prince charming, Hiyori's face once again started to shine.

And I'm afraid that in her eyes, I don't even exist anymore.

My heart was boiling with anger and the sound of it echoed in my head.

"Y'know, Hiyori, isn't he suspicious~..... I feel that everything he said is fake...."

"Huh??!! Watcha' saying??!! There's no reason for such a hot guy to lie to us right?! Are you stupid?!!"

"Eekk...!"

Every single word from Hiyori pierced my heart. I was totally beaten down by her ultimate capricious theory.

That pressured attack made all my old theoretical defenses become useless; nothing could help but to simply shrink into a small lump.

“Hey, Konoha, ignore this boy here, let’s just go in, okay?”

“Eh? No, I was told to kindly welcome this boy, too.”

Saying that, this time he walked towards me.

“Um, I’m Konoha. Uh, best regards?”

“.....I’m Amamiya Hibiya. Nice to meet you.....!!”

I tried my best to restrain the furiously mad flame of jealousy in my chest and used up all the effort to say those two basic lines.

“Wow~ this is great, Hibiya. He greeted you in such a friendly manner! Then, let’s go in, ‘kay? Right, Konoha?”

“Ah, yea”

Without pretense, I glared at Konoha whose back was being pushed by Hiyori, and walked into the house.

What’s with this dude?

Referring to Hiyori’s brother-in-law as “sensei”, also to have been told to welcome us into the house, I guessed he was his student or something after all.

No, even he is.

The important thing right now is to get rid of this guy ASAP, then figure out a way to make Hiyori’s eyes turn to me.

I stuck my middle finger to the mad Asahina fans who were teasing me in the air, then went into the house and slammed the door using my other hand.

Children Record 2

In the room echoed the sounds of the ticking clock.

It was almost 9 pm.

Light bulbs that had been hung all over the otherwise bare ceiling created a perfect, not-too-bright atmosphere in the living area.

In the kitchen stood Kido who had been deftly washing 6 people's sets of dinnerware for the last few minutes. A mountain of dinnerware was neatly stacked in the cupboard.

On the sofa opposite of the one I was sitting on, Konoha, who had just finished his meal, was having a fight with his eyelids. Drowsily, like he was about to fall asleep, he said "no, no" and continued the battle to keep his eyes open.

"Nnyaaaa..... Can't eat anymore..... Ah, can't eat anymurr....."

Meanwhile on my left, my pathetic sister was happily slobbering while still deep in her sleep.

..... *Wait a second. What the heck are we doing? Are all the others that childish, or is it that Kido looks remarkably like a "mother"?*

Seriously, I don't know why, but this totally felt like a sleepover at some friend's house.

That morning I even frowned and said to myself "Who are these Mekakushi Dan people? So suspicious", but after only a day I was already on good terms with them.

Even someone like me, someone who hadn't talked to anyone for such a long time, could get along with them easily. These people were friendly to that extent.

"She's eating even in her dreams, wow, that's Little Sister to you..... But speaking of it, she fell asleep immediately after the meal, what is the meaning of this, Master?"

"Just ignore her. I think she's turning into some sort of cow, don't you?"

Maybe because she was pretty tired, Momo fell asleep within just a few minutes after finishing her meal.

"She was even so angry before when she was called fat, what's wrong with this kid....."

I'm afraid that she herself had already completely forgotten about that. That moment was already too far back to say things like "I'm not even married yet, you're exaggerating".

"Ah, it's not that bad. Perhaps she was too tired. Hey Kisaragi, wake up. If you wanna sleep, go to my room."

After washing the dishes Kido took off her apron that had “skill” written on the front which gave it a carpenter-like feel, and walked towards Momo.

She gently knocked on Momo’s head, but the other responded with no more than “Ehh~, surprisingly, I still can eat.....”, and continued the happy feast in her dream.

“Ah~ sorry. Once this girl falls asleep she never wakes up until dawn. Just ignore her, she’ll be okay”

“Still it isn’t good to leave her like this. No choice, I’ll have to carry her.... Hm!?”

Just as Kido was about to pick Momo up, her expression slightly twisted like she hadn’t expected something.

“S-surprisingly..... much from Kisaragi.....!”

Kido tried to carry Momo, but compared to how easily she could carry Hibiya, her breathing became rapid this time.

Speaking of which, I had once read Momo’s profile in the idol dictionary where her “weight” was written, so I couldn’t stop myself from laughing that moment.

After seeing how Kido was running out of breath while she was carrying Momo, I diverted my attention towards Konoha, snoring on the sofa.

This dude was pretty unbelievable. Because of his constant dumbfounded look it has always been really hard to understand what he’s thinking.

He was now in the house of someone he had just met and yet took no caution and was just sleeping soundly.

..... Pretty much like a child who grew big in an instant.

Judging from Hibiya’s behavior, these two seemed to have been involved in some complicated “incident”.

No, not just them, Ene too, Mekakushi Dan too had something unexplainable that had happened to them.

I kind of forgot about it, but when I looked at Ene’s face back then I remembered that the girl might have also had something that had happened in her past. Hiding a special identity like that was pretty incredible on its own.

“What on earth happened to this girl before we met?” Not that I’ve ever considered it, but even if I were to ask her, she’d just hesitatingly fudge over it.

Unexpectedly, when I looked lazily at my phone screen, Ene who couldn't have known my thoughts was excitingly preparing a blanket.

“……………What are you doing?”

“Eh? What, I'm getting ready for sleep”

“Ah, ahhh, I see”

I remembered Ene boasting once by saying “I am highly powered so there's no problem even if I don't sleep at all!”…………

Fine, if I insulted her there'd be trouble, so it was best to simply ignore her.

“Huu, sorry for waiting”

Along with the sound of the closing door, Kido returned while relaxing her shoulders.

“Speaking of it, it'd be better if she could slightly reduce her appetite.”

“Haha, I'm really sorry. For disturbing you all these days”

“No, it's all our doing. Please don't mind. But today………… this situation is just too much” murmured Kido, looking surprised, and sat down on the sofa facing me.

At that moment the only ones still awake were Kido, Ene and me. Konoha, who had just dozed off, was lying softly on the sofa beside Kido with both his arms lazily stretched out.

“Well, well, looks like Mr. Impostor is already sleeping~. How willful”

Ene sneaked under her blanket, leaving only her face uncovered, and muttered while she glanced at Konoha's face.

“What's with 'Mr. Impostor'?”

“Erm. It's my nickname for that guy. He's easy to mix up with someone else so I decided to call him that.”

“Ah, about him resembling your friend, right? Speaking of it, your friend actually…………”

Just when I almost spilled out my question, Ene suddenly glared at me sharply.

"W-what the..... Ah~ I know I know. As long as I don't ask right.....?"

Upon hearing that, Ene gave a satisfied smile.

"Good for you to know that. Hey, the one who's confused here is me. But I'll explain it to you, Master, 'kay? Next time."

This time she looked a little bit sad.

She completely prevaricated it as usual, but I guess it was my first time hearing something like "I'll tell you later" from her.

Wait, no, this brat was still herself. Perhaps she said it just for fun.

"Well, everyone has their own problems. Say, I've been thinking whether I should tell him about those things, so I brought him over....."

Kido looked next to her; Konoha was deep in his sleep. What was with all the struggle to stay awake earlier? At any rate, he failed.

"Haa...." Along with Kido's sigh, Konoha eventually fell from the sofa onto the floor.

"Can't help them now. Well, actually, we can't do anything right now anyway."

Kido leaned back on the sofa heavily, rested her arms on it and crossed her legs.

"Tomorrow..... huh. That boy, how's he doing?"

"Hmm? Ah. You mean Hibiya, right? The thing that appeared in his eyes, I'm afraid it may have been a symptom of a "power" like ours..." said Kido while staring at the ceiling.

Apparently Hibiya hadn't woken up since he collapsed, but it seemed that he wasn't in an unstable condition. Seto, who understood the situation well, volunteered to guard him just in case. That was the current state of things.

"I see..... Well, since Seto's the one taking care of him, there's nothing to worry about."

I unconsciously stared at one of the bare light bulbs on the ceiling as I said that. Kido quietly laughed:

"Nope, nope, that guy sure is reliable, but he also has some weak spots. Perhaps he might be sleeping now."

From the first time I met Seto, he gave me a “reliable” impression, but there were also things about him that only someone like Kido who had known him way longer than me would understand.

Can't be blamed, I'd just met him that morning, so there was no way I could deeply understand him.

“Say, you all.....”

“Hmm? What?”

Kido gave a dazed look and looked at me who stopped halfway in my sentence.

Is it really okay to ask something like this? Is there any way to turn back if I do?

As I was having those thoughts I started feeling sleepy, which made my mouth open slowly.

“Those eyes of yours..... To be honest I don't know if I can ask this but, it is unusual, isn't it? Same goes to Momo's condition. She said she doesn't remember when she'd become like this, but I don't think it's completely unrelated to you all.”

Facing my straight-forward question, Kido still had the dazed look while listening, but after I finished, she gave a warm smile.

“..... I should have told you before you saw this kid. Sorry.”

Kido bent her body forward and intertwined the fingers of both her hands between her knees.

“Eh, no. It's okay. I guess I'm just concerned about it...”

I suddenly blushed and averted my eyes.

“No, I should have explained it to you..... Just that, like you said, this isn't some common topic, not something you can freely talk about. We were all treated badly because of these powers. Therefore, to protect ourselves, we cannot reveal it to everyone.”

After hearing what Kido said, I lifted my head.

She didn't look sad, just that her eyes didn't have any darkness, as if there was a strong awareness in them.

“I-I got it. I didn't know this. Also..... Yeah.”

Right. After knowing about their matters, what can I even do?

That's right, that was the reason I stopped in the middle of my question.

Why am I interested in listening to this?

What can I even do?

The "incident" Hibiya was involved in, according to him, might have been fatal.

Perhaps even the cops won't be able to solve it.

Hibiya will awaken his power like Kido and the others while everyone else will protect that power and help him.

What else can I do anyway?

Is it really okay to just ask?

If I don't ask anything here, I'll just go back home tomorrow morning like nothing happened and just return to my own normal life, perhaps there's also that option.

That's right, this has nothing to do with me. I'm.....

“TRYING TO ESCAPE AGAIN?”

At that moment, I felt a chill run down my spine. My heart was aching like something was grabbing it and cold sweat was slowly oozing down my forehead.

“Shintaro? Oi, are you okay? You don't look well to me.....”

“Ah, ahh. No-no-nothing. I'm okay. Sorry.”

“..... I see. Perhaps you're tired too. Let's leave the rest for tomorrow, okay?”

Tomorrow, will I still be here tomorrow? Ene said “Let's go home” earlier. Perhaps I'm wrong, but she might be worried about me.

However.....

“..... No, a little is also fine, tell me, then.”

If I go back to that room, what can I even do?

Maybe it was because I didn't want to leave these guys. Maybe I was afraid to be alone again.

"I understand. I'll tell you then. This is how I got my power:"

Kido, as if she understood everything, smiled again and blinked her eyes to make them turn red.

"Eye concealing power..... That's what Kano called it, it's basically a power to reduce the presence of myself and my surroundings"

While talking, Kido picked up a magazine from the side of the table. She handed it towards me and the magazine was gradually becoming transparent, starting from the edges, and eventually disappeared without a single trace.

As I was staring at it I once again realized what an incredible power it was. That's why it was reasonable that Kido didn't want to be up-front about it.

If this power became known to the public, it would be a hot topic in the media for days. Eventually she'd be brought to some research center or whatever and perhaps things might come to the worst ending possible.

"Before getting 'this', I also had parents. Although I didn't have any blood relation to my mother. My father was a cruel person. His company bankrupted because he was a womanizer. Before he died, he even burnt down the whole house."

"W-what the heck....."

It was really extreme to hear Kido's entire past within no more than a few seconds. Kido however didn't look pained because of those memories, she was rather indifferent about it, speaking as calmly as if she was talking about her elementary school days.

"Haha. Cruel story right? However, the real tale begins here..."

"Oh, oh....."

"When my father set the fire my entire family was in the house. In the end my sister and I couldn't escape..."

"T-that would've killed you for sure....."

To be honest, I got quite scared from listening to her. When Kido realized that, she made a slightly nasty smirk and continued.

"Ahh, of course I died. Bit by bit I couldn't breathe anymore and my body was burning."

"Eeek....."

"And then, that moment I saw it. The wall twisted and separated, LIKE A BIG, WIDELY OPEN MOUTH WITH SHARP TEETH!!"

"UWAAAH!!!"

Kido said the last part excitedly, like she was telling me a precious horror story.

And perhaps due to good timing successfully managed to pick up my fearful heart.

To be freaked out by the person who had shown such embarrassing poses in the haunted house earlier that day made me regret a lot.

However, after waking up my curiosity, Kido didn't continue her story, but simply folded her arms and made a happy expression, as if she was asking how the story was.

"T-then?"

I finally voiced my question, but Kido remained in her pose and happily replied.

"Hmm? The end."

"HUH?"

As if I've been messed with I shut my mouth, unable to say anything.

According to the story, the protagonist should have burns all over her body. After that, she almost got eaten by a mysterious huge creature, but this girl didn't look like she was ever digested. No matter what, I couldn't connect the dots.

"T-THEN WHAT'S WITH THE POWER?!"

"Ahh, I got it after I woke up in the debris of my house. In some way the burns that I should have had disappeared, how unbelievable."

"T-then what was with the big-mouth-thingy..?"

"I only saw it, my memories after that are totally gone. Maybe I was swallowed by it. I have no idea how I was the only one to have survived, too"

Kido lifted her hands and made a gesture that said "nope, can't help it".



In the end, despite knowing the whole story, she herself also had a lot of parts she couldn't understand, and this mystery just got deeper than before.

"I see..... That means that surprisingly, you don't know either..."

"Oh. Of course, I planned to investigate anything that could be investigated..... It's in progress now. Back then, I tried to explain everything to the police, too, but in the end there wasn't any progression at all."

Sure, if this story is told just like that, not only that no one would believe it, but it'd even complicate things further.

So, if Hibiya's incident was similar to Kido and the others, it had to mean it really wasn't a good idea to tell the police about it. Kido bringing him here, saying she'll help him was because he was similar to her past self.

"*Unable to make the police believe*". That's right, it was something really unforgettable.

Anyway, the most unusual part of the conversation was perhaps the "huge mouth" that swallowed Kido. Other than that, the story was really miserable, but it wasn't something that couldn't happen in reality. The mouth was the only thing that could be connected to their "abnormal traits".

"What about the others? Did Kano and Seto get swallowed by the 'huge mouth' too?"

"Kano said 'I saw the same thing too', but he lost his memory after that like me. As for Seto, he got his power drowning in the river, so he's not sure whether he saw it or not"

When Kido said "drowned" I suddenly recalled the fogged memories of my childhood. It was a memory that I could remember from time to time, but after listening to Kido, that single memory reached a different scary atmosphere than before.

"..... Momo becoming like this, perhaps it was after she drowned in the ocean..."

"You mean Kisaragi?"

"Ah, that's right..... but I'd rather you wouldn't mention this in front of her. At that time..... my father, who tried to save her....."

That time, Dad, who had tried to save Momo, was seen by a lot of people. However, when Dad swam towards Momo, both of them were swallowed by the waves.

I was at tuition at the time I got the news from Mom. After all the hard work of trying to find them, Dad was still nowhere to be found, but on the second day, Momo was found on the beach and was rescued.

"I see..... I understand. This sure is something to better avoid mentioning in front of Kisaragi."

"Thanks for the help. Just that I thought of it after listening to your story."

That's right, from the part where Momo drowned there was something similar to Kido's story.

Momo was found the next day. That must've meant Momo was in the sea during all that time.

Simply considering it, would a human actually be able to survive in that kind of situation?

No, impossible. Perhaps it should've been treated like a miracle, but using the word 'miracle' as an explanation was just meaningless.

But still to say, if we considered the "huge mouth" Kido had mentioned, then everything seemed clear enough.

The moment Kido burned, the moment Momo drowned, they were both swallowed by the "huge mouth", at least that's how the explanation goes. If during all that time they were trapped inside of it, they must've been spat out just before being found.

It *was* a bizarre hypothesis, but weren't Kido's and Momo's "eye powers" the best evidence to prove it?

"Those eye powers of yours, if you got them because you had seen the "huge mouth", then Momo was perhaps swallowed by it as well..... No, although it's a bizarre assumption..."

It *was* a bizarre assumption, but even logic was weakened when it came to these guys' "eye powers".

Comparing all their stories, I realized that the key to this matter was that "certain thing".

The unbelievable existence that was the source of those unbelievable powers.....

"Mhmm, we did make the connection before, but adding the thing that happened to Momo, 'it' is undeniably the reason for our powers activating. What's more, Kano said that he saw the same thing, for now it's..... like that. Just that....."

"Just that?"

Seemingly concerned about something, Kido put a hand on her lips.

Just like she was solving a jigsaw puzzle on the clock, her eyes were focused on a spot of the table.

"It just makes people... frustrated. Same as Momo, all of us almost died "with some certain person". I heard that Kano was with his mother and Seto was kinda with his friend when he became like this" said Kido while staring at the table as if she was still concerned.

"However, the ones who were saved were only us. What's more, the people who were with us had perhaps "disappeared" in some way."

After listening to Kido I had a big realization.

"Hey, when your house burnt down, your family..... Um, were their bodies found?"

"Ah, they were. But... only my father's and mother's. My sister's body on the other hand wasn't. The only one who was found alive among the piles of debris was me."

"That means....."

Double event. Eye-related powers. "Huge mouth".

And according to Hibiya who had said "There's a girl who might already be dead now, I need to save her", an inference gradually popped up in my mind.

"You were all swallowed by 'something' together with someone else but were later the only ones to return and get these powers.....?"

Kido immediately continued the idea, trying to catch my words.

"And those who were together with us were swallowed but were not found until now. If that's the case, that means that they're still in there."

This unexpected bizarre truth, it may have been a coincidence, but it made sense as an inference. Momo's power, the disappearance of my father and the undiscovered "truth" were all connected bit by bit.

"Actually we had already thought about it. 'Perhaps inside the [mouth], our important people are still in there as we are convinced. However, the most important key, our memories about what happened 'there' are completely gone.....'"

Kido sighed again and leaned on the sofa. Losing parents, relatives or important people and now living like this, these guys had really hard lives.

Maybe after becoming lonely, because of those weird powers they were always mistreated.

I wonder how they felt about living like that.

Me, who couldn't imagine it, who always lived on freely with his own will, kind of got an uneasy feeling.

That's right. Me, who had given up on everything and chose to be lonely, how could I understand how they feel?

Knowing how "hard" it is to be hurt so much was the reason they told the fallen Hibiya "We'll help you."

"Well, that's it then. For now, just think that the process of getting the powers is still unlikely to be known. Just that until Hibiya can control his power in some way, I think it's on us to take care of him. After all, we're pretty familiar with dealing with this kind of thing..." said Kido, slightly calming down the nervous atmosphere.

"I don't know whether the girl who was swallowed together with that kid is safe or not, but it'd be better to find her step by step....."

"NO, WAIT."

Kido was about to change the topic, but for me the discussion was far from over.

As if it was for sure, as if someone had pointed the way to move forward, the direction of the next step was right in front of my eyes.

"You said you 'don't remember what happened in there' right? I think you even said 'it was the same with everyone'."

Kido made a face showing she didn't get what was I trying to say and replied with a slightly timid voice:

"Ah, yeah. It's true. We could only remember the things that happened after we woke up"

"No, it can be remembered. Hibiya even told Konoha 'you were just standing there and watching'. Perhaps that boy....."

When I came to that point, Kido opened her eyes widely, noticing my intentions.

"He remembers, doesn't he? The thing that happened after he was swallowed. "

When I stopped talking, Kido immediately stood up, as if she was headed somewhere.

"O-oi, where are you going!? Isn't the boy sleeping right now!?"

And after she heard me, Kido reacted at once and sat back down on the sofa.

Perhaps embarrassed because of her impetuous action, Kido blushed and lowered her sight.

This action, compared to her serious way of speaking, made the thought *"Ah, this person is a girl"* pass through my head, words that might have gotten me punched like Kano if I said them out loud.

"Well, that's also true..... even for me. It's been years since I got to see my father, so if I'd get to meet him again....."

What would I do if we saw each other again?

What would I say?

Seeing his son being a NEET for years, being rotten, I wonder what my father would think...

"Shintaro?"

"Hmm? Ahh, sorry, sorry. Well, let's just leave the rest for tomorrow. I guess Kano isn't coming back"

There were different kinds of clocks like cuckoo clocks and digital clocks everywhere in the base. Even on a tiny shelf there was a machine that dripped some kind of unknown liquid; perhaps that was a clock too. All those clocks equivalently showed that it was 10.30 pm, each in its own style.

"Hmm, yeah. What the heck is that dude doing..... Still anyway, today was a tiring day. It really was the first time bringing a bunch of people back here."

Kido looked at the entrance, sighing, but it was clear she couldn't refrain herself from being happy about it.

“That ‘leader’ title, sounds like it’s pretty tiresome”

Maybe I accidentally embarrassed her by saying that; Kido’s face became redder than before.

“Sh-SHUDDUP! Don’t call me that! I-I’m going to bed! Okay!?”

Kido was already clumsy back then, but this time she was so agitated that she stood up with a loud klunk! and went towards her room.

I speechlessly stared at her departing figure, but Kido suddenly stopped and turned back “You can share the blankets with Konoha; I already took them out, they are right there” and pointed at the blankets piled up beside the entrance, then disappeared into her room.

“What’s up with her, seriously.....”

No matter how serious she looks, she’s still a girl, okay? If that’s the case, then she is a creature that I will never ever understand. I should stop thinking.

As soon as I stopped thinking, perhaps I was at my limits already, the sleepiness attacked my body.

“Haa..... I’m so damn tired.....”

I stood up from the sofa and as expected, my body felt as heavy as lead.

After I finally reached the blankets, I took two from above and returned to the sofa.

After covering Konoha who was sleeping like a dead log on the floor with a blanket, I realized that I didn’t ask Kido where to switch off the lights.

“Uhm..... where’s the switch, where is it”

Looking around the room, I couldn’t find anything resembling a switch.

Ahh, this is really annoying, I want to sleep so damn badly, what should I do? Anyway, if I sleep with the lights on it’ll be.....

As I was slowly searching in the room, I felt someone’s breath behind me.

When I turned around I was shocked: there stood Mary with fluffy hair, wearing a fluffy white gown, and she was staring at me with eyes full of suspicion.

“..... What are you doing, Shintaro?”

"LET ME EXPLAIN! WHEN SHINTARO WAS BEING STARED AT INTENTLY BY A YOUNG GIRL, HE RELEASED A BIG AMOUNT OF COLD SWEAT!" My mind was ringing with such an intense explanation. I had done nothing wrong, but just like that explanation said, I sweated cold sweat and replied with a strained smile.

"O-ohh!! MARY!! It's nothing, I just wanted to turn off the lights, but I'm not sure where the light switch is!"

After I reasoned my way out, Mary returned to her usual look and pointed at the dartboard on the wall.

"The switch is there. Just press the center."

I sighed in relief and pressed on the center of the dartboard like Mary said, and with a click, the hanging bulbs all went out at once.

"EE-EEEEEEEEEKKK! DON'T SWITCH THEM OFF SO SUDDENLY!"

Mary's sudden scream made me so shocked that my heart jumped all the way to my throat, and after I quickly switched the lights back on, Mary gave me the suspicious look again, this time with tears in the corners of her eyes.

"..... What are you doing?"

"No, NO! I was just testing okay!? Uhm..... aaaAAAAAH I'm sorry I'm sorry!"

Ahh, this is SO annoying. I really wanna sleep ASAP, why did this kind of thing even happen?

"I understand....."

Mary simply changed her direction and headed towards her room.

Why did Mary wake up? I want to ask her, but then she won't go away, so it is better to not stimulate her with weird stuff again.

"G-goodnight~"

I waved my hand, watched Mary as she returned to her room and switched off the lights.

Haa..... I sighed and fumbled onto the sofa.

I lied down, covered myself with a blanket, and looked at my phone as usual, it seemed like Ene was still wrapped in her blanket just like before.

“Annoying brat.....”

There was no response from under the blanket.

I put the phone on the table and closed my eyes.

In the dark there were only echoes of the air conditioner growling.

Thinking back, it felt like that day was not just one normal day, but a very very very long day.

I'd just met the Mekakushi Dan members like, that morning..... No, to be precise I met them at the shopping mall, but still, they were the kind of people who could easily get along with me within such a short period of time. To think about it carefully, it really was the first time having something like this happen to me.

Being invited by your friends to come to their house, eating together, talking about each other's stories while discussing tomorrow's plan.

Hearing this, it was actually just like hanging out with normal friends in your daily life.

Although it felt quite strange to me. I had never thought that I'd be given a chance like this.

..... *Is this really right? Really?*

Feels like the more people I meet, the more fun I have, the more it gradually becomes thinner.

Still, still at least for now, at least during this summer vacation, letting myself understand the feeling of having friends is acceptable, isn't it?

In the dark, I asked some certain person who didn't exist but wasn't me.

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“Hey, Shintaro.”

“.....What?”

“You have made so many friends, isn’t that great? When you’re together with them, are you happy?”

“Impossible. I have never thought of that”

“Liar. Because today, you seemed to be very happy, Shintaro. It was my first time seeing you smiling so happily”

“I told you, there is no such thing. I’m just being led by the nose. I’m pretty tired here”

“Hey, Shintaro. Do you remember me?”

“What are you saying, of course I remember!”

“Then, why don’t you call me by my name?”

“Eh..... What’s with this all of a sudden, what’s the matter?”

“Hey, Shintaro. Why don’t you call my name?”

“S-STOP..... Please, stop it.....”

“Of course..... So, you can’t? You can’t remember anything about me?”

“Enough..... Stop. Please, I’m begging you!”

“HEY, SHINTARO”

“UWAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!”

“UWAAAAAAHHH!!??”

“Y-y-y-you scared me to death! What’s wrong?!”

My vision suddenly became clear, the view of the hideout returned without any changes.

I turned my head and saw Momo looking at me with a worried face, with her hand on the dartboard-shaped switch.

“Ahh, it’s you. N-nothing. Just a nightmare.”

“W-what kind of dream.....? You don’t look so good, you know”

Momo worriedly ran towards me and stared at my face.

“I told you, it’s nothing. Anyway, what about you, what’s wrong? I thought you were asleep”

“Eh? Nothing, just kinda woke up..... So, I thought maybe I should check out that kid’s condition or whatever~”

Momo laughed like she was sorry for waking me up.

“..... I see. But you didn’t wake me up, so don’t worry.”

“Uu~mm. But we had a lot of activities yesterday and today, so Nii-chan must be pretty tired, right? Have a good rest, okay?”

“I will..... Ah, anyway” I said as I stood up from the sofa and looked down directly at Momo, who was blushing.

“W-what.....? What’s the matter, Nii-chan.....?”

“Why are you doing this?”

Faced with my question, Momo gave an anxious and scared look.

“E-eehhh..... I don’t know what you mean.....”

Forming a clear difference with me who didn’t move my sight, Momo couldn’t resist moving her sight towards the floor.

“Once Momo falls asleep she wouldn’t wake up even if you’d pry her with an iron. So this is pretty worrisome. Also, Momo had an argument with Hibiya today. I don’t think she’d be worried about him so that she’d go check on him. Lastly....”

While I was saying all that, Momo was completely speechless. Perhaps because she was staring at the floor all the time, I couldn’t see her expression.

“Momo calls me ‘Onii-chan’, *Kano*.”

For just a moment, the air around my 'sister' wobbled, and in the next moment Kano, with his silly smile that was exactly the same as all day, was looking at me.

".....Well well~, you're really interesting, Shintaro-kun. Fantastic."

"Thank you. Now, let's hear it from you. Why were you purposely disguised as Momo in the middle of the night?"

With an attitude of someone who wouldn't take a single step back, Kano's expression didn't change at all, he still had that sly grin on his face.

"Haha, you hate me, huh? But there's no way you wouldn't, after all, it was your very important little sister that was being impersonated..... right?"

Kano blinked his eyes as if he thought I was stupid.

It wasn't just a silly prank like the ones Ene would usually play on me, this seemed more like molesting the untouchable, most sensitive part of a person, filling it with such an ugly attitude.

"That wasn't exactly an answer. Why were you disguised as someone else when you are in *your own* home? I want you to clearly explain your reason for it."

"Mm~ hmm. Of course I was doing something that benefits me. However, what would happen if I said it out loud? After knowing the reason for my actions, what would Shintaro-kun do, I wonder?"

Kano suddenly swiftly turned around, facing me with his back, with his arms spread out.

"Because isn't this strange? I only become energetic at this kind of hour. Am I forgetting some... *important things*~ as I was thinking about that?"

Kano remained in his pose and I still couldn't read his expression.

However, the difference was that those words that seemed to be looking deep into my heart, tightly reined my chest.

"..... What are you trying to say?"

"Mmm~? Oh no, no, I mean it literally. Shintaro-kun, you are~ making a face that makes it seem like you almost forgot about something important, y'know"

Suddenly the light bulb above Kano's head started to flicker.

And every time it flickered it was like a flash against Kano's back.

"WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT.....?!"

"Ah~ bingo? How frustrating, this is getting exciting. Seems that you really forgot about her, Shintaro-kun"

Faced with Kano's manner of speaking, my anger reached the boiling point.

"I SAID I DIDN'T FORGET ABOUT ANYONE!!!!!"

As I said that I grabbed Kano, forcing him to turn towards me. Just then, the bulb flashed fiercely.

The next moment, my loudly thumping heart was crushed into dust.

"THEN, WHY DIDN'T YOU SAVE ME?"

Shoulder-length black hair, with a scarf as red as fire.

With a smile that I could never mistake for another, Ayano appeared right there.

"A-AAHH....."

My legs started to tremble, as if I was about to collapse.

My mind gave up on comprehending the situation and from my mouth spilled sounds that couldn't be formed into a sentence.

"Hey. Answer me, Shintaro. Could it be that you've forgotten about me?"

Ayano's face suddenly approached with a lifeless smile, her eyes staring at me like glossless artifacts, and I couldn't breathe.

"N-no..... I....."

The thoughts that I've been thinking for years were trying to spill out, but I couldn't turn them into words. In the end I couldn't say anything.

Ayano didn't wait for me. And just like that day, I couldn't tell her anything.

"Fine. Goodbye, Shintaro. Be happy."

The next moment all the bulbs in the room turned themselves off and before light returned to the room after a moment of darkness, Ayano in front of me had already disappeared.

My legs suddenly became unstable and I dropped to my knees.

Supporting my body with my trembling hands on the floor, like something had burst out of me, big teardrops spilled out and fell.

As if induced, my refrained feelings spilled out one by one and I couldn't move.

..... Was this punishment? Was this punishment for me, who didn't listen to that person and couldn't lend her a hand?

"I'm sorry..... I'm sorry....."

The words I finally said out loud quietly echoed through the room and unnoticeably, quietly disappeared.



Kagerou Daze 03

Sounds of cicadas were echoing slowly.

There are cicadas even in a city like this, huh, I thought as I looked at a tree along the roadside, but there weren't any cicadas to be found on it.

I heard that cicadas only live for one week, but in fact they can hide underground for years and years when they are still larvae, so their lives are actually pretty long.

If that's the case, maybe by doing their utmost best to make those sounds they use up all the energy they'd been saving for years.

Even if they hide in the ground for years, save their energy, once they come out to the surface they will still be crushed. From my point of view, cicadas have a beautiful posture which makes me extremely envious.

"Look, we're here"

Hiyori put down her shopping bags and pointed. On the other side of a low brick wall, our destination, the graveyard, was broadening out.

"By the way, you look really pale, are you okay?"

"Eh? I am?"

"Yeah. First of all, you have really heavy bags under your eyes and you also look very gaunt"

The main reason behind my failure of an image pointed out by Hiyori was in reality the person who had just posed the question, but it seemed she couldn't notice it herself.

No matter what, due to the things that happened yesterday, my pressure was already beyond the range where this body could hold on.

First, as soon as we've arrived, Hiyori fell completely in love with Konoha, and her interest in me reduced even further, which made me be treated like a nuisance.

On top of that, yesterday was supposed to be the day I could "buy a phone", but despite all my begging, Hiyori replied with nothing but "I'm too lazy to go". Nevertheless. I kept on trying different approaches to get her to go, but the shopping

mall eventually closed down because of some incident or something. In this really really unhappy situation, all we could do is turn around and go home.

I could've just bought a phone at some other phone store, but it appeared that children could not sign the registration without being accompanied by an adult.

And so, at first I wanted try getting a phone with the help of my reliable and marvelous plan "The manager of the shopping mall has a deep friendship with Hiyori's father", but all that gracefully turned into bubbles.

"Well then, we'll put buying the phone off for now." Hiyori immediately concluded, and in the end all I did the entire day was stay in the house and force myself to see something that I wasn't willing to see at all.

Why must we be staying with HIM?

First of all, Hiyori's brother-in-law was currently staying in another house so he allowed both of us to stay in this house freely. It should've been like that.....

Brother-in-law seemed to be a pretty casual person. From what Konoha had told us "I've been staying here for a while now" "I'm being taken care of by Sensei", I'm afraid that he was lodging.

Since he's been letting his student to stay, he should've at least told us about it.

No, there was a possibility that Hiyori had actually been told about him but decided not to say anything to me.

No matter what, my plan to enjoy the city life with just the two of us got completely screwed up.

As expected, I couldn't swallow my dinner, and because of my jealousy burning vigorously I couldn't sleep either, so my face had become the way that Hiyori had just pointed out earlier.

"Hey, Hiyori. Why are we visiting the graveyard all of a sudden? I thought you were feeling energetic today and wanted to go shopping....."

"Hmm~ I just went here without thinking..... I guess. Yesterday, when I entered my sister's room, I suddenly felt like I kind of needed to visit her"

It was my second day in the city.

Before, Hiyori had told me "that day we're going shopping, so you'll have to accompany me", but that morning she changed her mind "Quit the shopping. Let's go to the graveyard"

That thorn in my eye, Konoha, didn't seem to want to wake up, so he wasn't with us. Hiyori said "*actually I wanted him to come along too*" and was sad for a while, but for me it was something I've always wanted.

By the way, Konoha didn't come along to the shopping mall yesterday because of his extremely childish excuse "*Sensei said that I cannot go out when I'm supposed to guard the house*". So even if he did wake up, he still wouldn't join us.

"I see..... Come to think of it, today's the Obon"

In the graveyard that was located not far from the house we were staying in, there were a few visitors here and there, but relative to the size of the graveyard it didn't seem to be exactly packed with people.

"That's right, but today is also the anniversary of my sister's death. Although my family seldom mentions it. Well, they can't be blamed. Perhaps my sister didn't even know I was born."

Hiyori's sister was in a way a very unique person since young. It appeared that one day she proclaimed "*I want to go look at the world outside!*" out of the blue and simply ran away from home.

Ever since then her relationship with her family had been severed, and the first time Hiyori ever saw her face was she was in the coffin.

"During the funeral, my brother-in-law seemed resentful. I don't know why, but I can clearly remember that part."

She read the names written on the gravestones one by one while slowly walking on the long narrow pathway.

Among the new offerings, besides flowers and Japanese desserts, there were also toys like miniature cars and such, which made me lower my sight as I couldn't make myself to look at them straight.

"He just lowered his head in front of my parents and said nothing. Actually, he was always there for my sister who would always go by her own decisions. At that time I was thinking 'Adults are really troublesome, aren't they' "

Hiyori was as expressionless as ever; she wasn't nor angry nor sad; she just spoke softly.

To Hiyori, her parents perhaps seemed stubborn at that time.

But still, for that irreparable thing, for that anger that had nowhere to be released, Hiyori's parents couldn't find anywhere to pour out their feelings. Thinking like that, I became speechless.

Suddenly, Hiyori stopped.

And right in front of her was a teenage guy wearing a black half-sleeved parka, standing in front of a grave while praying with his palms clasped together.

“Over there, that's my sister's grave”

Hiyori stepped forward again.

As I quickly followed her, the teenage guy seemed to notice us and turned his head in our direction.

Tea-colored hair, with big eyes which made a deep impression on people, that guy kept staring at us.

“That grave is my sister's. I'm very grateful that you visited her.”

Hiyori lowered her head and bowed to the guy, and after a moment, he looked at her in surprise.

“E-EH! EEEHHH??!! YOUR SISTER!?”

“Yes. So, did you take care of my sister when she was alive....?”

The guy looked at us brightly, and excitedly replied with an innocent smile.

“Oh, you really *really* do look like her! Eh? No no, how could I have taken care of anyone! Instead, I was taken care of a lloooooott by your sister!”

The youth innocently smiled, then suddenly let out a rough “ah.....” as if he realized something, put his hand on his lips and coughed a bit on purpose, and straightened his posture.

“Uhm, I accidentally became excited. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Hmm, is that kid your girlfriend?”

He asked, this time turning to look at me.

“Ah, well, rather than ‘girlfriend’ I should say ‘associate’..... ha-ha”

After saying that I blushed a bit, moved my sight, and scratched my face to hide the redness of my cheeks.

“Associate.....? Mhmm..... It’s really tough, isn’t it?”

Getting this unexpected reply I turned to look at the guy again. As if he took my words as his own matters, the guy sympathized with me.

“It *is* troublesome, right? Nah, I pretty~ much understand you. In a way I get bossed around by a *scary* person all the time. Every day I get punched and kicked.....”

The guy gave a helpless look and spread out his arms, showing that he felt troubled.

“T-those are really quite some hardships..... We are leading hard lives.....!!”

“Mhmm..... We must be strong.....”

Saying that, we clenched our hands.

Looks like we are pretty similar.

I thought I heard Hiyori mutter “*what is this*”, but who cares?

“Well~ then. Goodbye, I need to go right now, sorry for my courtesy! You two, do you have any plans for later today?”

“Eh? No, we aren’t busy, but we need to get back home by afternoon.....”

“I see.....”

After hearing Hiyori’s words, the teen who used to have a smile on his face suddenly turned gloomy.

But once I looked again carefully, I saw that his smile was still the same as before. *“I’ve been so depressed since yesterday, so maybe now I have the power to influence others to become negative.”* My worrying seemed to be another illusion.

Or to say, I wouldn’t ever want such a non-constructive power. If I could gain a superpower, I’d undoubtedly choose the power to become invisible.

“Today is such a nice day, so it’d be nice to play outside for a while~. What a waste!”

The guy crossed his arms behind his head and pouted.

"Ahaha... that's right too. It'd be kinda nice to play outside for a while"

Hiyori smiled softly.

"Well, take care then! I'm going now. Bye-bye~"

The guy smiled at us again, turned around and quickly walked away.

"Seems like he's a pretty good person, Hiyori."

"Yeah, but he's still suspicious..... My sister was pretty old by comparison, what's up with her and such a young guy....."

Hiyori made a serious expression and started to think about something incredible. And she was right in front of her sister's grave; that was a bit over-doing it.

"You must have been pretty capable!" she said energetically, looking at the tombstone.

I wonder how her sister would look at her at that moment. I'd really want to ask her if I could._

With that, Hiyori started to place the snacks she'd bought in front of the grave.

Never met before. That means Hiyori shouldn't have known what kind of food her sister liked.

That's right, the food that Hiyori placed there was all of *her* favorites.

Giving someone something that *you* think is tasty. I could understand that for Hiyori it was the most she could ever give.

After she finished placing the offerings, Hiyori faced the grave, clasped her hands and closed her eyes.

What kind of person was she? That guy just now told Hiyori that she "really looked like her", then was she as harsh as her?

"How much longer are you meaning to pray? Hey,"

Upon hearing Hiyori's voice, I shot my eyes open.

"Don't tell me you were thinking about asking my sister some weird questions?"

"H-how could that be! No, I was just thinking what kind of person she was ~ or something" I wasn't thinking about that kind of stuff, but I still somehow rushed with my answer.

Hiyori went from a look of suspicion to being expressionless again, and mumbled "she was a normal person, definitely".

-
The sunlight increased the heat, burning with its quiet power.

It was already far past the time of the appointment with Hiyori.

"Well then, shall we go back? Although that boy just now said "it's better to play outside for a while" or something....."

"M~hmm, today really is a good day, so I'd be angry if we went back now. So wouldn't it be better to go buy some stuff first?"

Hiyori started to mumble "I wanna go to that shoe shop..... no, I should go to merchandise store in front of the station first.....".

"E-EEHH!? We don't have much time left, don't we!? I think we should go meet with your brother-in-law first, get the idol's autograph and go later....."

"..... No, there's only one place to go. Follow me"

After saying that, she quickly paced away.

Ah, if it was like that, I had no choice. No matter what, I couldn't stop her. Or say that I was already very happy when she'd asked me to follow her.

-
Out of the graveyard, Hiyori swiftly turned right on the street.

I had a new discovery; Hiyori's sense of direction was very good. She'd only been in the city for two days, yet she seemed as if she'd lived here all along, always rushing towards her destination decisively.

On roads that I could get lost on even with a map she could walk forward without any difficulties. That was really awesome.

Not thinking about anything nor asking anything, I just kept following Hiyori's steps for about fifteen minutes.

The number of pedestrians around us was increasing; I faintly understand that Hiyori's destination was at the city center.

I already felt it yesterday, but I still couldn't get used to the city's atmosphere.

Different types of advertisements, cars passing by and the laughter of people decking layer by layer were creating a massive dissonant voice, making my brain mixed up due to the overload of information.

Also, above all, there was the heat.

Recalling the time from few days ago, I was still filled with high expectations about my life here. Right now, I finally deeply understood my own ignorance.

Even having I don't know how many lives still wouldn't be enough for me to survive in this kind of place.

Now, I wasn't even sure I'd survive the summer vacation.

"Ah, here it is. Wait for me for a while"

A row of colorful shops. In front of one of them, Hiyori stopped.

From the way she unhesitatingly went into the shop it looked like she arrived to her destination.

"What kind of garish shop is this....."

While waiting for Hiyori as I was told, I was observing the decorations outside the shop.

A shockingly pink wall, decorations resembling cookies and candies everywhere. On the board surrounded by neon lights to increase the impact at night, the shop's name was written in huge, shocking highlighter-yellow letters.

The overly-caloric decorations combined with the heat it made me want to puke.

After waiting for Hiyori I should go drink something..... If I dry out, who knows? I might be used as an ornament and put next to all these cookies and candies.

The automatic door opened with a beep, Hiyori who was carrying two small bags appeared.

“Ah, welcome back. You bought the things you wanted?”

Hiyori smiled and replied “yeap!”

That cuteness overload made my heart beat faster.

Ahh, amazing, amazing, coming to see this was so worth it.....

“I BOUGHT A GIFT FOR KONOHA!”

I take back my words. I shouldn't have come.

That guy again. What the heck is going on, seriously?

GIFT!? WHAT THE HECK IS UP WITH THAT!!!??

“Eh? What do you mean by gift...?”

“What? It has nothing to do with you...”

“PAK” the topic was sliced into two, I couldn't find anything else to say.

Looks like this whole time, staying in this city has been an intense training to increase my immunity towards mental pain or something.

“Ah, but look, I bought one for you too”

“Ah, I see..... EEEHH!!?? FOR ME!!??”

“That's right. Look”

As Hiyori said that, she slowly handed me a small bag she was carrying in the other hand.

The next moment, my failure of a life until now passed in front of my eyes and my head became hot.

“T-THANK YOU.....”

“W-why are you crying..... Gross.....”

I took back my words, but it was just too great. I never expected to be given such a surprise, I hadn't even dreamed about it before.

“I'm so happy..... Thank you. Ah, can I open it!?”

"Hm? You can"

It was a small bag with light pink polka dots on it, from the weight I guessed that inside was some kind of keychain. No, perhaps some kind of stationery?

As my chest kept expanding due to anticipation, I opened the small bag with the brightest smile I'd made the entire day, but then, a foul smell that resembled the odor of rotten raw fish came from the bag.

-

"UWAH, IT'S SMELLY!?"

Faced with that unexpected situation I couldn't resist shouting.

From a bag handed by a little girl who came out of a boutique, a seriously foul seafood smell was coming. Of course I was shocked.

Who could ever expect that?

I gingerly twisted the bag and looked inside. The thing that came out was a keychain of some sort of mysterious creature; a salmon with human legs.

"Ah? What, any opinions?" Hiyori muttered, expressionlessly and overbearingly, of course.

"NO, EEEEEEEHHHHH!!!??? NOT AN OPINION, BUT THIS IS WHAT!? WHAT IS THIS!!??"

If it were a fruit-scented keychain, I could still understand, but this thing here was sadly just some product that was made for the sole purpose of making fun of people. NO, it was a complete and utter failure.

"It's called 'Red Salmon-chan phone strap'. I felt you'd like this kind of thing"

"NO NO, NOT AT ALL, OKAY!? ANYWAY, DID I EVER DO SOMETHING THAT MADE YOU THINK I'M LIKE THAT!?"

"Nope, just that I thought you'd like this smelly thing"

Saying that, she sneered "hmpf" with her overbearing sight again. Ahh, she was totally messing with me.

"U....uu..... but still, thank you"

I still felt happy when I received the gift, so I couldn't debate it anymore.

Looking at my miserable expression, Hiyori sneered "hmph" yet again.

"Well, well, it's almost time to go back..... We don't have much time left"

"Yeah, right. Well then, we should go from this road....."

As usual, Hiyori swiftly paced forward, but then noticed something and came to a sudden halt.

I looked at Hiyori's feet - the culprit that actually caused the defiant Hiyori stop was unexpectedly just a black cat.

It appeared next to her leg and while I was thinking about where it could have come from, the black cat started to softly rub its face against Hiyori, purring.

"Wow it's a cat, Hiyori. Looks like it likes you"

That black cat with neat fur swiftly ran away after purring towards Hiyori, and just like that, went into a long narrow alley.

"Ah~. It went away. I really wanted to pet it~. How about you, Hiyori.....?"

"I WANNA ADOPT THAT CAT...!"

Hiyori's facial expression became even more extreme than the day before, when she'd met Konoha for the first time. Her face turned red, her breathing became rapid.

"Eh, what did you just say.....?"

"I'M CHASING IT, HIBIYA!" said Hiyori and ran into the alley to chase after the black cat.

Different kinds of thrusts were spinning in my head, but anyway, I decided I should taste the joy of my name being called by Hiyori, and followed her.

Speedily passing by the metal trash bin that was located at the back door of a building, then running up the small stairs covered with moss, and finally, running through the cramped crowds on the big road.

“Uwah..... H-Hiyori, I don’t think we can find it now.....”

“No, I saw its tail just now. There it is”

Hiyori turned left and kicked the ground, increasing her speed.

Daringly running through a place with lots of people was pretty incredible.

Luckily because I was running behind Hiyori I didn’t run into anyone. Step by step I ran along the roadside.

“Haa..... haa..... THERE IT IS! RIGHT THERE!!’

Hiyori took another speedy turn left; there was a children’s park.

I ran into the park too, and in the shadow of the light blue swing, sitting there was the black cat.

“Gotcha!”

Hiyori was decreasing the distance from the black cat bit by bit.

“Huehuehue..... Good kitty, good kitty. Be a good kitty and let me pet you to my heart’s content.....”

Hiyori gasped and stepped closer, releasing an atmosphere that would make me want to run away as soon as possible if I were the cat.

However, one couldn’t say that the cat felt like running, it didn’t even flinch: it simply kept staring intently at Hiyori.

While I was thinking about that unbelievable thing, I suddenly noticed something that sent a chill down my spine.

The eyes of the black cat that were staring at Hiyori were as red as blood.

Didn’t Hiyori notice it?

By looking at Hiyori who seemed attracted by that gloominess, it felt suspicious - as if something had possessed her body. It felt dangerous.

“H-Hiyori! Wait! Don’t you think that cat looks strange?!”

“Eh? What!?”

When Hiyori heard my voice she turned her head, shocked, and the black cat glanced at me and paused as if it wanted to say something. After that, it ran off.

“Ahh!! IT RAN AWAY!”

I moved my sight, Hiyori was walking towards me, looking very angry.

“B-but that cat just now was strange wasn’t it? So I was..... worried.....”

“BUSYBODY! YOUR WORRYING MAKES EVERYTHING EVEN MORE TROUBLESONE!!”

Hiyori yelled, glaring at me. This still wasn’t enough to calm down her anger, so she continued with her scolding.

“Anyway, I never wanted someone as unreliable as you around me, I wanted Konoha to worry about me! And what the hell is wrong with you that you’ve been stuttering since yesterday!? ARE YOU STUPID!?”

Having all those words thrown towards me continuously, my head congested.

I know what this feeling is, but isn’t it a bit too late for what I’m wanting to do?

“What stupid..... WHY..... WHY WON’T YOU UNDERSTAND!? It’s not like I stutter on purpose.....”

“Ehh? I thought you liked to stutter like this. Then what’s the reason behind it?”

“It’s because.....”

I couldn’t say anything to oppose Hiyori’s sharp glare; that was the usual situation. Now, too, my words were immediately blocked.

-

Ahh, has it ever happened before that I turned all the things in my mind into words without hesitation?

No, perhaps never.

If I said “those words” out loud, what would happen then?

My brain was stunned, my heart hurt. With it came a burn.

“W-what.....”

“It’s because..... towards Hiyori, you.....”

“Stop it.....”

“Since before, since a long time ago, I’ve always.....!”

“I TOLD YOU TO STOP, DIDN’T I!?”

With Hiyori’s shout I suddenly regained my consciousness.

As I gingerly looked at her face, Hiyori looked like she was about to cry.

Perhaps it is because they were stimulated by Hiyori’s voice that now the cicadas that used to be quiet instantly became noisy, and their sounds, coming from everywhere, surrounded me as if they were blaming me.

That never ending moment was already enough for me to regret my impetuous action.

-

“YOU'RE THE WORST”

When at last I heard those words from Hiyori, compared to every single scolding I ever got from her, that one pricked the deepest into my heart.

“W-well

Supposing I couldn’t say anything, my dumb mouth spoke its own words.

“I’m going back. Don’t follow me.”

I couldn’t even look at Hiyori anymore, I just lowered my head. The cicada’s corpse on the ground was lying on its back.

Did that person say something about me to someone? Even I could tell that much.

My tears started to flow down from my cheeks on their own, each tear made a black spot on the ground.

-

No matter what, it didn't matter at all. Hiyori's footsteps that were gradually getting further away suddenly stopped.

"You, when did you get here...?" Hiyori voiced out and from her intonation I could interpret who she was talking to.

Figuring it out was truthfully easy, but it was the last thing I wanted.

I lifted my head and turned to Hiyori. As expected, at the entrance of the park stood Konoha, sweating.

"Eh..... I was here all along. Well, when I woke up I realized you two were gone..... So, I thought that I had to go look for you....."

Hiyori asked Konoha, who pieced his words one by one, in a trembling voice:

"..... That conversation just now, did you hear it?"

Konoha stayed the same as usual, with an expression that didn't let anyone know his thoughts, he replied straight away:

"Eh? Yea, I heard it."

The moment Hiyori hears this, she will run away somewhere, I could clearly imagine the scenario at that moment.

That thought was the reason I was one step ahead of Hiyori who dashed out of the park. My legs were already running towards her.

.....What was I planning to do?

Was it to find an excuse again?

Or was it to hold Hiyori's hand earlier than Konoha?

As expected, Hiyori who ran away had already lost her lissome to run like before, in the crowds. She was just trying to get away from here, dumbly moving her legs.

Just a few more steps and I could hold her hand.

But just when I was so close to it, the scene in front of me stunned me.

In front of Hiyori, at the end of the regularly arranged white stripes, there shone a red light.

And the meaning of that... It was something that could be easily understood without even thinking.

It definitely represented “DESPAIR”.

-
“HIYORI!! RED LIGHT!!!”

Just, just one more step..... no, it was already too late.

My last step was so unhesitating that it surprised me.

Have I ever taken such a bold step towards Hiyori before?

From Hiyori’s surprised look I could tell that she didn’t expect what happened next at all. I wasn’t expecting it too, so we were the same.

Before the truck approached with a loud beep,

I finally did wish to hold Hiyori’s hand until the very end.

Otsukimi Recital

On the endlessly wide field, a cool breeze is blowing.

My body feels so light. As light as if I have grown wings.

I kick the ground slightly and my body bounces up high like it can fly anywhere.

Pon, pon, I happily fly across the field and suddenly realize there are cows scattered everywhere, I don’t know since when.

Is this a gathering? Is some kind of steak buffet starting?

Not wanting to bother myself with that, I launch myself in the air again so I could happily fly on. But suddenly, my body becomes heavy, and I hit the ground with a loud 'thump'.

"OUCH! W-Why suddenly....."

My butt is struck with an intense pain.

As I want to rub it to relieve the pain I hear laughter from somewhere.

"AHAHAHAHA! Auntie, watcha' doing!"

I turn my head, Hibiya is there, hugging his stomach, rolling on the floor laughing.

"W, W-W-W-WHY ARE YOU HERE!?"

It's embarrassing to be seen in such an awkward position, but it's really unlucky to be coincidentally seen by this boy.

"Eh? Who wouldn't notice if you made such a loud noise when you fell down?"

My face is slowly becoming hot. Being teased by this kid is something I really regret.

"T-THE? You may not know about it, but I'm an idol, okay!? I. D. O. L!"

Thinking he'll be left speechless, I strike an arrogant pose that I've never done before.

It's slightly..... or should I say very embarrassing, but it's the only way to make this slow kid acknowledge my charm.

"Eh? Nope, what are you saying? Auntie, you are a cow."

"Y-you still said that.....!"

"No, see for yourself if you don't believe me"

Hibiya quickly hands me a hand mirror and reflected in it is.....

A HUGE COW PROUDLY POSING AS AN IDOL.

Shocked, I touch my face. The cow in the mirror does the exact same thing with its hoofs on its face.

"See? You are a cow. A.U.N.T.I.E"

"UWAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!!! UWWWAAAAAHHHHH!!!!!!"

Suddenly, I woke up.

My whole body was soaked with sweat, my brain blurred like it was put in a blender and therefore couldn't work.

I was surrounded by a thin layer of darkness. I could see a long and thin ray of daylight shining in, was it because of the curtains?

What in the world had actually happened to me?

Even if I tried to slowly rearrange the situations in my head, I still couldn't remember what brought me here.

I felt something fluffy on the lower side of my body, probably a bed.

Still, what happened, since *when* have I been lying on this bed? I had absolutely no memory about that.....

Because I couldn't see anything, I had to feel around for my surroundings. I knocked on the bed, but then something moaned "oww....."

I was shocked and quietly shrieked "Eek!", but then realized that Kido was sleeping beside me.

Then I remembered that I'd kind of hit her hard, and a nervous feeling ran down my spine.

"W-why is Leader here!? That means..... don't tell me this is her room?"

Slowly, my memory became clearer.

Yeah, I remember we brought Hibiya from the hospital back to the basement, later I ate the dinner Seto made, and then.....

"..... I was sleeping on the sofa"

"ZOOM", a gloomy sound effect rang through my head.

Since a long time ago brother had always sourly told me "Before you get married you must NEVER EVER show your sleeping pose and your dream talk to ANYONE". My sleeping posture was *that* bad.

Well, at first I didn't believe him and even said "Brother, you said that, but actually you're just scared to let me go outside, aren't you?" or something.

However, after he pulled off the prank of recording me while I was sleeping, I saw the video of me saying weird things in my sleep that made me want to tear myself apart, like "Ah, it came out of the butt" and "If I hear some funny talks my stomach will fly away~ Just kidding☆". I'd never slept in front of anyone ever since.

Of course I burnt that video tape.

Thinking about me, spouting that kind of dream talk in front of everyone in the middle of the living room, almost made me puke.

No, since I'd told Onii-chan "If my ridiculous posture is exposed in front of anyone, just kill me", and I was sleeping on the bed for now, I guessed nothing had happened.

However, I knew I should be more cautious from that point on. I never knew that I would fall asleep immediately dinner..... Immediately..... after dinner..... "Because Auntie, you are a cow."

I suddenly thought about that dream, and with a "BOOF!" I punched the blanket.

Kido moaned "owww....." in response.

"O-Oops..... By the way, it *was* all that kid's fault. Kids these days are really presumptuous....."

After saying that, a sudden feeling of guilt attacked my heart and shut my mouth.

That's right, yesterday, Hibiya collapsed at the entrance of the hospital and Kido brought him back to the base.

Hibiya's anger at that time wasn't something to be dismissed as "just a presumptuous kid".

For me who would never glare like that, the feelings that were piled inside the boy's heart were completely unimaginable.

"That boy, what had actually happened to him? By the way....."

The thing that surprised me were "*those eyes*".

His eyes that became red at that time were without doubt a symptom of a new born "power" similar to the ones me and Kido and the others had.

When I met the Mekakushi Dan I got to know people who had powers too, but that was my first time seeing a power being discovered.

"Those eyes, I wonder what the reason for them being like that is. Is it some kind of disease? Impossible"

Slowly, I directed all my attention to a distant spot I've been staring at and the surroundings of my eyes gradually became hot.

"It's a troublesome power, but I wouldn't have met everyone if it wasn't for this. It helped us out a little, so I think I sort of like this power now"

Anyway, it was true that I still couldn't use it perfectly like Kido and Kano.

Practice..... huh. Well, eventually I just ended up running a lot, so basically I didn't learn how to use it yet.

Now to think of it, I don't know what kind of power it is but I believe Hibiya will also be having a hard time.....

"..... No, I will not forgive him until he apologizes"

That's right, the guilt for calling a pure teenage girl a cow or an auntie is deeper than the sea.

No matter what, if he didn't sincerely apologize and correct himself I would never forgive him.

"Well then, I should get up now~ Anyway, what time is it?"

I took out my phone out of the parka's pocket and checked the time, it was 7 am.

"Oh! Mhmm. It feels good to get up this early. I'll take a shower before the others wake up"

I lifted the blanket at the side of the bed that was pressed against the wall and crawled from under it.

As I crossed Kido and left the bed I looked at her face to ensure that I didn't wake her up.

"..... Hmm~ She's indeed a pretty girl"

Kido was wearing normal female pajamas and was sleeping sweetly and soundly. She had a face so pretty that it could make other girls jealous.

"Because of her face it seems even more incredible when she talks in that way"

She's always cool but sometimes sweet. Somehow I felt like I'd heard that from someone before. *What's going on?*

No, it was just one of those times when you can't remember something, so you think that you've heard it before! It was right to take it as that, I guess.

I reminded myself that I should take a quick shower.

I couldn't open the curtains, so I had to feel my way through the room in the dark.

On the way my waist banged into a table and I accidentally yelped, but it seemed that it didn't wake Kido up.

She's was the leader yet she was sleeping like a log..... this person.....

I finally reached the door and opened it. The living room was quite bright, finally there was a morning feeling.

That brightness lifted my spirits, and I continued my way towards the bathroom happily.

As I looked at the floor I noticed Konoha who was under the sofa and my brother who was gripping his phone tightly on the opposite sofa, both sleeping soundly.

“Huhu..... Onii-chan must be tired after all those outings”

Seeing that Onii-chan had gotten along with the rest of the Mekakushi Dan felt like I made a huge contribution to help him return to the society.

After Onii-chan returns to the society, I'll let him build a cute house for me. It's decided.

I passed through living room, switched on the lights in the changing room and bathroom, then opened the lowest drawer and put my spare clothes I'd brought from home next to the sink.

I took out a towel, locked the door, took off my clothes, but just when I entered the bathroom, violent knocking came from the other side of the changing room door.

“Gyyaaaahhh!!”

I panicked and wrapped my body in the towel and just for in case stepped further away from the door.

“S-sorry! This is Momo! I'm taking a shower!”

There was, however, no reply from outside. The person just continued to aggressively knock on the door.

I felt a different atmosphere.

If it were to be someone from the base, he or she wouldn't continue banging in the door despite knowing I'm already inside. In that case.....

"A R-ROBBER?"

I didn't know whether my words were heard or not, but with another "BAM!" the door was knocked on violently again.

My legs went weak with fear.

"U-uwaah..... s-sorry!!! NO! I mean, err, there's nothing valuable in here, okay!? NO, REALLY! Y-yeah, I was even called 'a cow' yesterday, oh my~ That was really bad..... a-AHAHAHA....."

I sat down on the floor and started to chant and beg for my life, then, from behind the door, came a voice I'd heard before.

"Auntie.....? So you knew it yourself anyway, huh?"

At that moment, "BANG!", I violently hit the door without thinking.

"Uwahhh!?" A shout was heard from the other side.

My voice trembled severely due to anger and indecision. Well, of course it did. Who wouldn't be mad about something like that?

"C-calm down a bit, okay? Sorry, um..... is my vest in there?"

"Vest?"

I looked around and on the highest shelf there was something resembling Hibiya's vest.

"Ah? This one? It's here"

"R-really?! Give me back!! There's something important in it!"

"Important, you say..... Haha. You're so anxious because you're worried about it, huh? What important stuff is there~ What's inside~?" I said with smoldering and resentful sourness.

Hibiya had a pretty good reaction when he noticed my evil intentions.

“U-UWAHHH!! DON’T STEAL IT, OKAY?! I GOT THAT THING FROM SOMEONE IMPORTANT!! SERIOUSLY, DON’T STEAL IT, OKAY!?”

“But I kinda feel like stealing it after hearing you say that. What’s inside this pocket~?”

“STOP IT!! SERIOUSLY, PLEASE, JUST STOP IT!!!!!!”

As I ignored Hibiya who was continuously banging on the door, I put my hand into the vest pocket, and my hand felt something like a paper bag. "OH, OH, I found it, I found it. I wonder what's inside this bag~"

I can't remember what happened after I took out the thing out of the bag.

All I remember is that I burst into the changing room and said "PLEASE!! GIVE IT TO ME!!", and then saw Hibiya's face go red when he saw me, there was also a slight scent of the ocean. I reflected about it, but I couldn't recall anything else.

*

"I see~, you two were swallowed up, huh..... that's bad....."

".....Uhm, Auntie, you don't understand at all, do you?"

“Ahahah..... Hey, at least I got the point.....”

I guess we were far away from the hideout. We were walking on the sidewalk. The leaves of the roadside trees refracted the sunlight by a suitable amount, so the path was perfect for a stroll on a sunny day.

After the dispute from earlier, Hibiya ran out the base as expected.

Kido had said that "It'd be dangerous if he activates his power", so I tried my best to stop him, but he didn't listen to me, so eventually I had to run after him, hence the current situation.

We bought sandwiches for breakfast at the convenience store, ate them cleanly and completely, and about that time Hibiya told me about how he was involved in that incident.

However,

What Hibiya told me was so hard to understand.

From the part where the truck hit her to the part where they entered the unbelievable world.

Hibiya watched his friend die countless times, then eventually he was spitted out of that world alone.

By the way, to let me fully understand the story, he repeated it three times, and from all that hard work I could see that he was actually a nice kid.

And also that my brain was pretty bad. How pathetic.

“M~hmm. So basically, Hibiya, you want to find a way to find a lost girl named Hiyori, right”

“Eh!?? Ah, yeah..... that’s right”

Hibiya showed he obviously wanted to add something, but perhaps he thought saying it would be useless and ended up staying quiet.

“Do you like that girl?”

“Yeah— HUH!?? Was it necessary to ask that?!”

“Ah~ I knew it. Oh my oh my~ you’re so mature~”

I grinned at the sight of the kid’s naivety, but wasn’t that how an “auntie” would act? When that thought came across my mind, my grin faded.

“WHAT.....! Sigh. Yes. I’ve liked her for a long time. Well..... although I got rejected”

“EH!? YOU GOT REJECTED!?? UWAHHH~!”

“Shut up, Auntie! Why are you so excited.....?”

Despite saying that, Hibiya shyly lowered his head.

He’s just a boy whose mind matches his age after all, I thought.

Even though I could hardly understand anything I’d been told, I still thought that the situation Hibiya was in was really cruel. I didn’t think that the little boy in front of me could do anything about it.

“But I need to save her”

Ignoring the worries, Hibiya murmured, softly, yet with determination.

“Well, then you really have to save her, okay?”

“.....Yes. Definitely”

Is there anything that we can help with?

Wait no, firstly, why did Hibiya want to go on his own?

“Hibiya. I know you ran away because you wanted to save the girl, but that’s pretty troublesome, isn’t it? Isn’t it better if everyone looks for her together instead of just you alone?”

“Haaa.....” facing my question, Hibiya let out big sigh of annoyance.

“Because an auntie like you needs such a long time to understand the situation. It was urgent, so don’t you think was there was no choice but to think that it’d be better if I went by myself?”

“Uhm.....”

Within a blink of an eye my words were completely debated by his.

I didn’t regret being impressed and thinking “*elementary school students these days are really smart*”.

“Also.....”

“Also what?”

“Also, it’s okay if they don’t believe me, but it’s *not okay* if they try to stop me. I want to save her as soon as possible.”

Hibiya’s eyes were so young yet they steadily looked forward, appeared reliable.

Despite all that, the youth had a lot of weaknesses, too.

Hibiya, who was from the countryside, didn’t understand this place too well, and he didn’t have enough money.

More, he had a new born eye power that he still couldn’t use by his free will, so there was the terrible chance of a rampage occurring.

"..... Still, I'm going with you. I'm worried, okay?"

As I said that, Hibiya stopped and looked at me with an untrusting glare.

I wasn't good at handling that glare, so I grinned to cover it.

"What's the benefit of helping me for an auntie like you? Those other people are like that too. Why do you want to help me this badly? That's the part I cannot trust"

There was a thorn in Hibiya's words, but I don't know why that made them kind of cute.

That feeling, the reason why I couldn't leave this boy alone was pure and simple.

"..... Just like Onii-chan"

"Eh? What did you say?"

"All~ right! Okay! If that's the case, then how's this: I help you, and if we find the girl, you'll stop calling me 'auntie' and also 'cow'. Andf-fat..... not even 'fat'....."

Because it was almost impossible for me to say that last word out loud, my speech had a good beginning, but a bad ending.

I shouldn't have put so much momentum in the first part.

"Huh? What. That's Auntie's 'benefit'?"

I crossed my arms and confidently said: "Yes. If that happens, I'll be *veeryy* happy! Ah, I can even be your partner if you want!"

Hibiya smiled for the first time.

"..... Weird. Well then, what if Auntie can't find her? What will Auntie do?"

"Hmm? Let's see..... I will....."

I was considering what I would do, but actually all that wasn't necessary. The answer was as simple as it could be.

"*What would the Mekakushi Dan say?*"

Because all I had to do was to simply tell Hibiya my answer, word by word.

Staring at Hibiya's eyes, I told him clearly:

“..... Until we find her, I will always stand by your side”

Everyone in Mekakushi Dan clearly understands how hard it is to face a problem alone.

I was saved by them, therefore I can smile.

And now it's my turn to stand by someone's side.

As a Mekakushi Dan member, that must be my most important mission.



“A-auntie, why are you saying things like that?”

Hibiya blushed and turned away.

And then, to be honest, I also realized that I said something pretty embarrassing, so I too became hot in the face and lowered my head.

Why the heck am I being shy towards an elementary school student...?

...

*fun fact: the thing inside the bag in Hibiya's vest was the one and only smelly Red Salmon-chan keychain :3

Kagerou Daze IV

“Hey, you. O~i. You.”

“I can hear you... what is it?”

“Is that so. As I thought, you suit *that child* well, huh.”

“It looks that way... still frustrating, though.”

“I know that feeling too. But I've explained this to you before, you know.”

“Eh?”

“With your 'Eyes', you can see through the 'Eyes' of people on the outside. So it's fine.”

“Now that you mention it, that's right. I almost forgot.”

“Isn't that why I told you? So that you don't forget.”

“That, I do remember.”

“Right. If so, then I have nothing else to say.”

“... Gotcha. Is it fine if I ask you something?”

“... Yeah. That’s fine.”

“Speaking of other people’s ‘Eyes’, it would be good if there was a way to seek them out...”

“Ah, if that was possible, it would be quite easy. It’s easy enough, though, since they have a bright red color.”

“Bright red, huh... That’s the same for me as well, right?”

“Of course. It’s cool. It’s the color of a hero.”

“So it’s fine to get used to it...”

“It’s all right. You believe in me?”

“Yes. Ah, it’s about time, huh.”

“Yeah. Take care. It’s be no good if you forgot about ‘her’, right?”

“Understood. I’ll come back as soon as possible. Ah, sorry, one last thing.”

“Okay. What?”

“Your red muffler, to whom did you take the ‘color of a hero’?”

“Hm, I wonder~ Ah, that’s right, try asking someone outside. Maybe they’ll have an answer.”

“Is that so. Well, for now, it seems like this is farewell.”

“Yeah. See you... I wonder how this’ll turn out?”

“I’ll do it. Definitely.”

“Yeah. Well then, see you.”

Kaien Panzermast

While wishing in front of the moon, I kept going toward the base one step at a time.

“This is embarrassing, oba—I mean, Momo.”

“It can’t be helped, right? Because Hibiya-kun fell so suddenly. You just made a mistake, yeah?”

“No, it’s hard to suddenly...!”

“Don’t whine about something so trivial! Even I’ve hurt my foot. Look, we’ve still got a ways to go.”

There was a substantial distance from the park to the base. From walking while carrying Hibiya-kun, if I was to sit down now, my legs would be probably end up being useless.

“Do you think everyone believed my story? I wonder if they’re really willing to cooperate with me...”

“You’re still doubting? Well, believe in us! We’re all comrades, right?”

“S-since when was that decided?!”

“Hm~? Just today!”

Hibiya-kun was incredibly perplexed at that. It made sense that that would be the case. Yesterday he had said such caustic words, Konoha-san bearing the brunt of his verbal abuse. To top it off, he had run away from the base without permission, causing Kido-san to worry.

“Ah~ ... Well, it’s fine, it’s fine.”

“Just now, isn’t that way of saying it somewhat delicate?”

“It was a joke! Ah~ Although I guess that might be the case.”

“Eh?! I was right?!”

While enjoying Hibiya-kun’s good reaction, I was finally able to see the base.

“Oh, loo~k, look! We can see the base now!”

“R-right...”

“Ah, that’s right. Before you were introduced to everyone, your ability—we never gave it a name, right?”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

Of course, there are no real rules, but all in all everyone was given a name. Somehow, that sort of thing feels nice.

“Because Hibiya-kun’s power is to see things from a distance... hmm...”

“... What about ‘Concentrating Eyes’?”

“Eh?”

“I mean, if no one else’s is called ‘Concentrating Eyes’, I wonder if that suits me. Since it’s somewhat of an amazing power.”

“... I wanted to give you one. Apart from that, it’s cool.”

“Then, what...?”

During that time, the door of the base came into view. The outstanding performance of Hibiya-kun and I, we’ll finally be able to talk to everyone about it.

With that, Hibiya-kun stood in front of the door, opening it forcefully.

“We’re back~! Momo and Hibiya-kun have... returned...?”

The scene of the living room in the base, despite what I had anticipated, was a chaotic mess. On the sofa, my brother who was dressed like a mountain climber groggily said “Ah... Welcome back...” in what I thought was a very thin voice. Meanwhile, a shirtless Konoha was staring confusedly in my direction. Mary-chan was repairing a large hole in Konoha-san’s shirt, while Kido-san was focused on reading some sort of collection of old notes.

Then, with a ‘hah’, Kido-san noticed I was here and stood up, closing the book with a bang. With that, she walked over until she was right in front of me.

“Oh, were you fine alone, Kisaragi? Did you need any help? Oh, Hibiya was with you. You guys came back at just the right time.”

“T-that is... Danchou-san? W-what on earth is this?”

With a grave look lacking any hint of mischievousness, Kido-san declared this to everyone in the room.

“Now that Kisaragi has returned, from today on we will put the ‘Kagerou Daze Capture Strategy’ into effect! This way, we won’t be careless in our preparations!”

“... Eh?”

“H-hey... Momo. I...?”

Despite only just beginning to understand everything, the ‘Kagerou Daze Capture Strategy’ would be the Mekakushi Dan’s last operation.

Rather, that that would be the last time I would spend with the members of the Mekakushi Dan, I at that time, of course, had no reason to know.